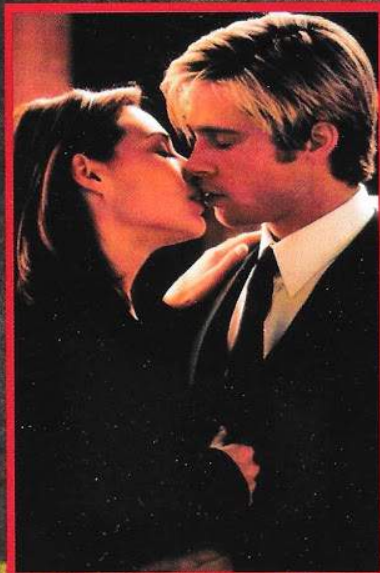


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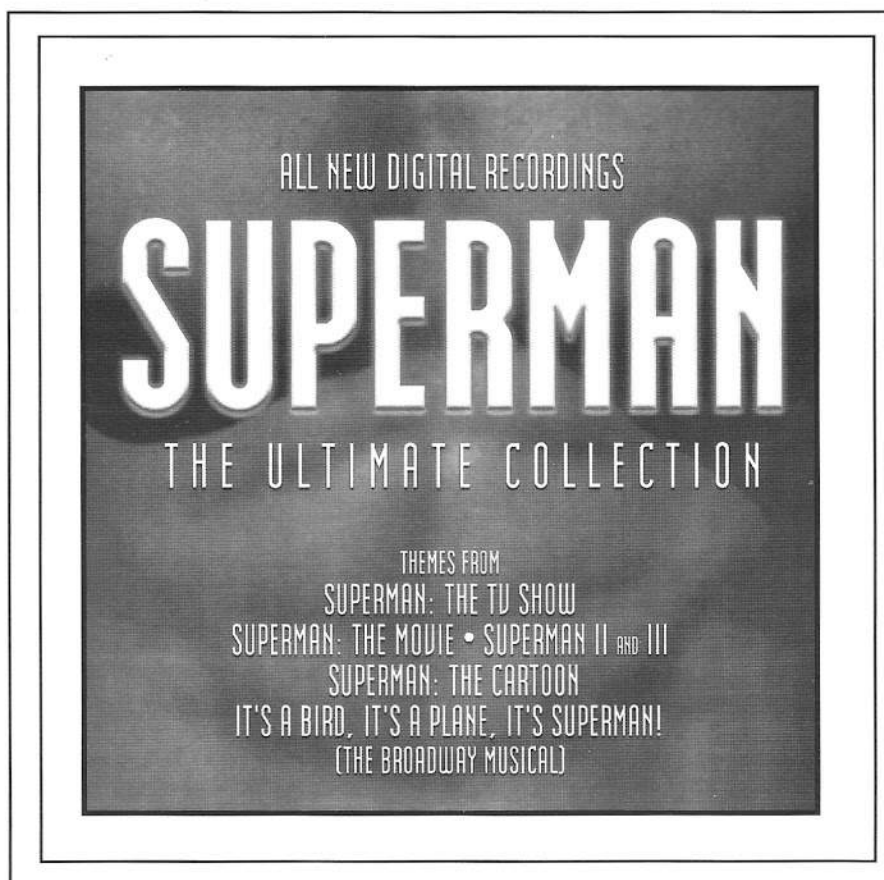


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(201) 445-0034 / Fax (201) 445-1496

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SPECIAL THANKS

Mary Amorosi, Charles Karel Bouley II, Eric Caiden, Campfire Video, Elite Entertainment Inc., Hammer Film Productions, Hollywood Book & Poster, Image Entertainment, Bruce Kimmel, Brian Lannes, Garrett Lee, Ian McKellen, Joe Moe, John W. Morgan, NBC Television, Ann Palladino, Toni Palladino, Paramount Pictures, John E. Payne, Pioneer Home Video, Rhino Records, The Roan Group, The Royal National Theatre, Kevin G. Shinnick, Universal Pictures, Phyl Valley, Varèse Sarabande, Jeff Walker, Marc Walkow, Warner Bros., Gary Wilson



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COVER: MEET JOE BLACK (1999), DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1932)

Scarlet Letters

I have been an avid reader of your wonderful magazine since Issue #7. The many insightful articles are most eagerly awaited.

I am pleased to see that you will be handling the exclusive release of the HAMMER HORROR CD. Thanks again for the great magazine and I hope you have many successful years ahead.

Howard Peretti
Burien, WA

We hope so, too, Howard, and thanks for the kind words about the Hammer CD. There are more discs on the way and they'll all be available from Scarlet Street.

I wanted to write and tell you to keep up the good work. A magazine of this quality is rare indeed. I enjoyed Issue #30 immensely, especially the articles written by Ken Hanke. His in-depth and enlightening review of BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN would've made James Whale proud. Hanke's thorough analysis of the film has given me some new takes on the old classic. I hope to see more of Hanke's work in future issues.

I am familiar with Hanke's work, as I have his *A Critical Guide To Horror Film Series* (Garland), which I heartily recommend. He is also the author of *Charlie Chan at the Movies* (McFarland), which I consider the definitive book on the subject. Maybe he can write a Chan piece for your magazine. I'd love it! Thanks again for a great magazine and a super issue!

Gary Litavis
Kennesaw, GA

A friend of mine loaned me issue #26 of *Scarlet Street* in which Rick McKay had an interview with David Manners. As a new fan of his, I thoroughly enjoyed it and want to thank you for sharing it with us.

I have only recently rediscovered the Universal Horror films on laserdisc, having picked many of them up at several Southern California Tower Records laserdisc closeout sales. David Manners was so memorable in DRACULA, THE MUMMY, THE BLACK CAT, THEY CALL IT SIN, A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT, and THE MIRACLE WOMAN. I was pleasantly surprised to discover a couple of years ago that he was still alive. My friend and I were both wondering if he was still alive. My friend seemed to vaguely recall reading that he had passed away several months back, but I checked the Internet Movie Database and it shows him as still living.

Did he ever marry? The IMDB mentions a wife named Suzanne Bushnell, but doesn't give any dates. Did he have any children?

I saw the new film on James Whale entitled GODS AND MONSTERS this

weekend and really enjoyed it. They have a wonderful recreation of the making of BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN in it and the actors playing Boris Karloff and Elsa Lanchester in both 1935 and 1957 are excellent.

Thanks for any further biographical information you can provide and thanks again for the most enjoyable article.

Rob Ray
rray@spacecraft.com

Sorry to have to report that David Manners died shortly before this past Christmas, Rob. Everything else (and we pretty much mean everything) can be found in the last interview Mr. Manners ever gave, which was printed in *Scarlet Street* #31. And if you enjoyed GODS AND MONSTERS as much as we did, then you'll want to grab *Scarlet Street* #30, too!

A couple of remarks about Issue 30, first of all based in Richard Valley's FRANKLY SCARLET column:

A number of years ago, I frequented a book store on 42nd Street (pre-Rudy, the beloved) and one day a short, wizened older man (much more wizened than I think his age) stood beside me at the



counter and asked the owner a question. His voice drove me nuts. I heard him speak again at least twice. The owner and I then decided that we knew the voice but could not place it. I was given the task of approaching the gentlemen.

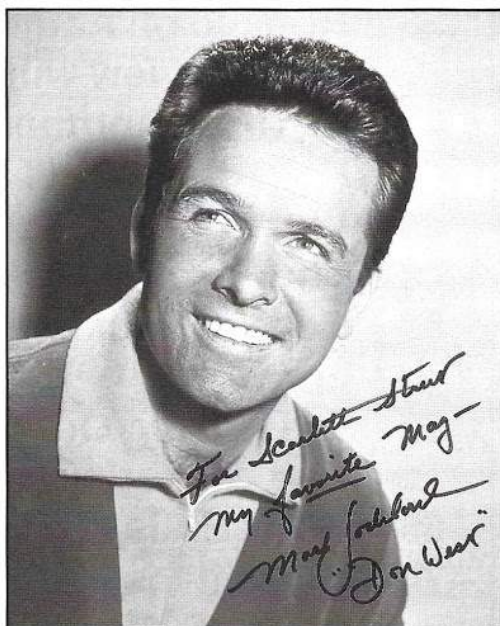
When I excused myself and said that I knew his voice but etc. etc., he introduced himself. "William Hickey." (This was before PRIZZI'S HONOR). I immediately exclaimed THE PRODUCERS and he thanked me for recognizing him. We talked a little and he told me that he actually had the final scene in the movie. (If you don't remember him, he's the drunk in the bar where Zero and Gene go to drown their sorrows.) Mel Brooks actually filmed a scene where Hickey's drunk is outside the bar in an alley and the entire brick wall crashes down on him. He survived. But the censors felt that it was too cruel and cut it. To that day, Mr. Hickey was sorry they did; he thought it was funny.

We spoke a few more times since that day. (And nothing was ever said about him being in that particular book store; we talked of other things.) Then he went on to do ARSENIC AND OLD LACE on Broadway and I unfortunately never saw him again. Nice older man, though, and a true gentleman.

Now, as to Mr. Ernest Thesiger: A good friend of mine (back in the sixties) was an English character actor. This is the story he told me. On the first day of rehearsal, the entire cast was usually assembled on stage; the lesser players; whereby the leads/stars would pass in review and welcome them.

On one particular play, Mr. Thesiger, no longer a young man, grew short of breath as he entered the theater and sat down in a darkened corner in one of those oversized fancy chairs. Two young actors entered, and one of them said, "I hope this cast ain't made up of a lot of old queens. They always want to paw you." Mr. Thesiger sat where he was and waited. Then he entered the theater to be the last star to shake the hands of the lower members. When he got to the young "hunk," he clutched his hand, simpered just a little, and said, "How nice to see you again. We must sup together again sometime. And he proceeded

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Continued on page 11

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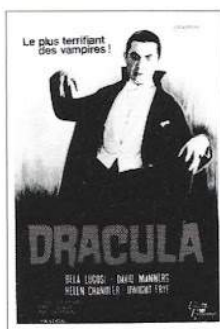
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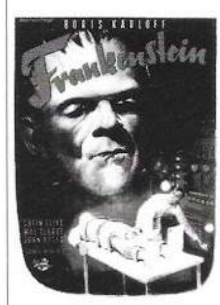
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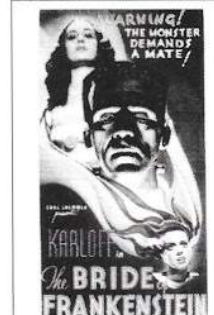
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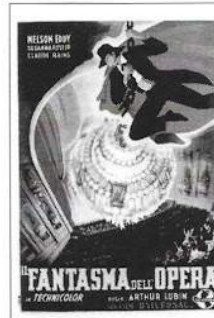
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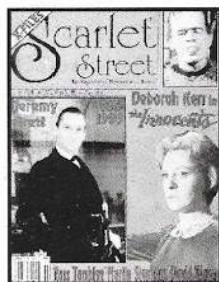
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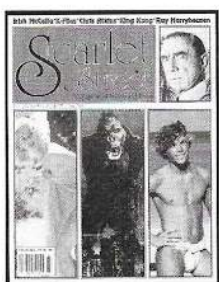
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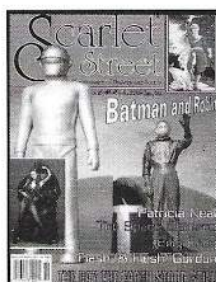
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Frankly Scarlet



Lewis Carroll and J. M. Barrie would never have survived the late 20th century. Witness the reaction of one righteous audience member of NBC's sumptuous production of *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*, aired this past February. "I used to love it [the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*]," griped the grumpy viewer on one of the internet's newsgroups, "until I realized Lewis Carroll was [a] sick twisted pedophile. How can you enjoy something knowing Alice was probably a victim?"

Then there's Barrie and the five Llewelyn Davies boys he "inherited" when their parents tragically died. The boys inspired Barrie to write *PETER PAN*, but it's questionable whether the famed author, obsessed with youth and of the opinion that "nothing really important happens after you are 12," would today be allowed to take them into his home.

It isn't very difficult to make an argument that Carroll and Barrie's interest in preadolescents was an unhealthy one, even if it was not sexually motivated but only a deep-seated longing for childhood and

childish ways. But in today's moral climate, in which suspicion equals fact and men are murdered for no reason other than race or sexual preference, the Victorian writers of a simpler age would automatically have been considered guilty of sex crimes and might have rotted in prison rather than write the classics of literature we read to this day. (Let's not let Queen Victoria's subjects entirely off the hook, though—there is the case of another writer of fairy tales, Oscar Wilde, to consider.)

Such is today's chaos in the name of morality, in fact, that I'm almost hesitant to write these words for fear of being called an advocate of child abuse. But the chance combination of several articles in this latest *Scarlet Street*—a stage review of *PETER PAN*, reviews of Disney's *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* and *PETER PAN* soundtracks, and the smear campaign launched against the makers of the film *APT PUPIL* (1998), which had the lawyers for several teenage boys accuse director Bryan Singer and members of his crew of being pederasts and child molesters—brought the subject to mind, while the recent rash of hate crimes against blacks and homosexuals, many perpetrated by the Blessed Guardians of Morality and the Status Quo, have prompted a little moral outrage on my part, too.

In this issue's interview with *GODS AND MONSTERS* star Sir Ian McKellen, writer Tony Earnshaw points out that "not all homosexuals are predators. The vast majority are not pedophiles."

The same holds true for 19th century writers and 20th century filmmakers—at least until solid proof is offered. As one of *Scarlet Street*'s contributors, himself a childhood victim, said to me, "The true horror of child abuse is diminished when



NBC's enjoyable if somewhat uneven production of *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*, the best ever made for TV, did not pass muster with some self-appointed Guardians of Morality.

the most casual of gestures can be confused with it." To think otherwise, as Lewis Carroll might have suggested, is nonsense . . .

Big news on *Scarlet Street*! We've at long last established residence on the internet as *Scarlet Street: The Website of Mystery and Horror*. Our own very talented John E. Payne designed the site and, if we think so ourselves (and we do) he's done a bang-up job. You can find the whole gang lurking about at www.scarletstreet.com. For further info, check out the ad on page 71.

Oh, and P.S. Catch *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* if it's repeated. The Mad Hatter's Tea Party alone is well worth the time . . .

Richard Valley

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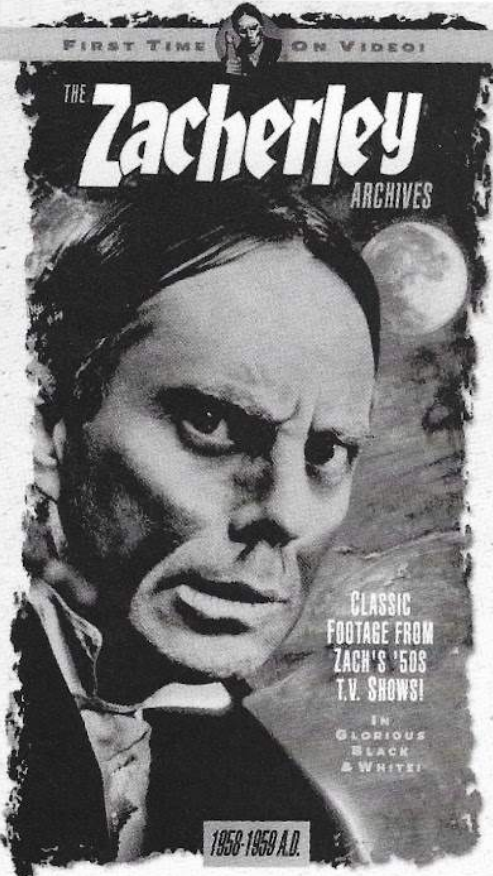
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SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 4

down the row of other (trying not to giggle) actors. It's been years since my friend told me that story, but I've never forgotten it.

Like your magazine (I've sent in a subscription in a separate envelope) very much. I had to order a couple of back issues because my local Barnes and (Ig)noble is not always up to date on certain magazines. I guess, when you've finally driven most of your competition out of business, you can stop giving decent service. Long live Borders. Now if they would only come up to my neck of the woods.

Incidentally, I've read Issue 26 and now Issue 30 and what is this gay sensibility some people are talking about. Am I missing something?

Bill Hooper

Pt. St. Lucie, FL

Bill Hickey was quite a character, all right, and quite a character actor. Ye Reditor saw him in that production of ARSENIC AND OLD LACE and can honestly say that, in a cast including Jean Stapleton, Polly Holliday, Abe Vigoda, and Tony Roberts, Bill was outstanding.

Enclosed is my check for a year's subscription to your fine magazine. A short time ago, my sister worked with a friend of one of the editors of *Scarlet Street* and she gave me a back issue (two years old) to read. She said it was my

kind of magazine. Boy, was she right! Any mag that covers the life and work of Joan Bennett is a mag for me.

I went looking for *Scarlet Street* in a number of stores and could not find you. I thought to substitute your mag with one of the other, countless horror/sci-fi mags, but, opening them, I realized they all did not achieve the high excellence that your publication offers.

These other mags had more gore, guts, and plenty of color pictures, but hardly any meaty text. (Doesn't anybody read anymore?) I think your magazine has an equal balance of horror and mystery. The writing is top notch, very well researched, well written, and nicely laid out. I was so glad to finally find you. Now I can read all the great articles about the history of *film noir*, the interviews about studio period actors, directors, musicians, etc. Thank you, Richard Valley, and all your staff for a consistent, quality publication.

Patrick Hammer, Jr.

Fort Lee, NJ

*And thank you, Patrick. Remember, if you can't find *Scarlet Street* in your local bookstore, take it up with the manager. He's there to be harassed . . .*

Ever since I purchased my first copy, #23, I have been amazed at this—for me, the best magazine in the world!

Articles are written with intelligence and an insight and understanding of the subject matter I have never experienced

before. For once, we can get an honest approach to a subject, whether person or theme. Where else could one have read those articles on David Manners?

Please keep up the great work and don't change a thing! But whilst I'm writing, how about printing some articles in the future on Diana Dors, Anthony Perkins, Ursula Andress, and anything on Tarzan.

Nigel Plumley

Vancouver, Canada

*Tarzan will be swinging back onto *Scarlet Street* in our next issue! Don't miss it!*

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Now Slaying

Debating in theaters in March is MGM's somewhat tardy horror sequel **THE RAGE: CARRIE 2**, starring Amy Irving, Jason London, and Emily Bergl as Carrie's creepy cousin. Also premiering the same month is 20th Century Fox's gory tale of cannibalism in the military, **RAVENOUS**, which advocates a "don't ask, don't tell, just eat" philosophy.

Premiering in April is the sci-fi mystery thriller **THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR** (Sony), starring Craig Bierko as a man caught in alternate computerized realities. (Don't you just hate when that happens?)

More April releases: Devon Sawa and **BUFFY**'s Seth Green star in the horror comedy **IDLE HANDS** (Tri-Star), about a young man whose right hand is possessed by the devil (a very creative excuse for whipping the lizard) . . . Computer games become disturbingly real in David Cronenberg's **EXISTENZ** (Dimension), starring Jennifer Jason Leigh, Willem Dafoe, and Jude Law (who got his start, as all good Scarlet Streeters know, in Jeremy Brett's *Sherlock Holmes* series).

The Hitchcockian caper **ENTRAPMENT** (Fox), starring Sean Connery and Catherine Zeta Jones, opens in May, along with Universal's big-budget, Indiana Jonesish update of **THE MUMMY**, starring Brendan Fraser Oh, and there's also a little thing called **STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE** (Fox), starring Liam Neeson, Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, and lots of other future action figures.

Future Features

To coin a phrase . . . "He'll be back." Arnold Schwarzenegger returns in 20th Century Fox's **TERMINATOR 3**, to be written and produced by **TERMINATOR** creator (and self-crowned King of the World) James Cameron. Cameron says he doesn't plan to direct T3, but The Hound bets that Arnold will bench-press the **TITANIC** trillionaire into taking the director's chair once again. And once T3 has terminated production, Arnold may star in yet another Cameron sequel, **TRUE LIES 2**.

Speaking of well-heeled directors . . . Steven Spielberg returns to his sci-fi roots with **MINORITY REPORT**, an adaptation of Phillip K. Dick's short story.

Tom Cruise stars as the top gun of a police force in the year 2040, where they arrest killers for murders they haven't committed yet. (Quite a time saver for everyone involved!) The Fox/DreamWorks coproduction is slated to hit theaters in the summer of 2000.

WHAT LIES BENEATH a New England university building that has everybody scared out of his or her frigging wits? Inquisitive professor Harrison Ford and his easy-on-the-eyes wife Michelle Pfeiffer intend to find out. This ghostly new Robert Zemeckis movie from DreamWorks is based on a story idea by the studio bossman Steven Spielberg. Watch for it to materialize in theaters late this year or next summer.



Cornelia Otis Skinner and Gail Russell in **THE UNINVITED** (1944), the latest in Hollywood's Needless Remake Sweepstakes.

Bond Bulletins

84-year-old actor Desmond Llewellyn reportedly makes his final appearance as "Q" in the upcoming MGM James Bond film **THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH**, which started shooting in January for a November 19th release. The job of devising gadgets for 007 (played by Pierce Brosnan once again) will be shared by Q's new assistant, a fellow named "R." (The Hound is surprised they didn't go in reverse alphabetical order for yet another bad double entendre.) John Cleese of Monty Python fame will play "R," so expect some silly walking while he hands out the gadgetry.

In other "Bond 19" casting news, Robert Carlisle (the lead stripper in **THE FULL MONTY**) portrays the villainous

Renard, who is invulnerable to pain due to a bullet lodged in his medulla oblongata. Robbie Coltrane returns in his **GOLDENEYE** role of Valentin Zukovsky, 007's Russian cohort. And in the Bond Babe department, Sophie Marceau (**BRAVEHEART**) portrays bad girl Elektra King, and Denise Richards (**STARSHIP TROOPERS**) portrays good girl Christmas Jones. A cousin of Holly Goodhead perhaps?

Imitation Cinema

The sweet scent of mimosa turns sour as yet another classic chiller gets needlessly retreaded. Mick Garris, director of many Stephen King adaptations—like the upcoming **DESPERATION**—plans a remake of Paramount's 1944 gem **THE UNINVITED**. Perhaps Mr. Garris feels he can improve on Hollywood's first great ghost tale. Whaddaya say . . . David Spade in the Ray Milland role? Jennifer Love Hewitt as Cornelia Otis Skinner? *Desperation* indeed.

Yet another ghostly remake is in the works. William Castle's 1958 drive-in fave **THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL** will be updated by **TALES FROM THE CRYPT** producers Robert Zemeckis and Joel Silver. The producing pair is heading up a new Warner Bros. division, Dark Castle Entertainment, which will specialize in mid-budget horror flicks. Silver and Zemeckis are looking to grab Geoffrey Rush, Elizabeth Hurley, and Marilyn Manson to haunt their **HILL** remake.

Updates Aplenty

Director Jan (TWISTER) De Bont has completed shooting his uninvited version of **THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE** for DreamWorks. Work now begins on all the expensive special effects that were so unnecessary in MGM's classic 1963 original, **THE HAUNTING**. The finished product will haunt theaters this summer.

Robert DeNiro plays Fearless Leader, the evil boss of vertically challenged bad guy Boris Badenov (**SEINFELD**'s Jason Alexander) and slinky spy Natasha Fatale (**LETHAL WEAPON 4**'s Rene Russo), in the upcoming Universal live action/animated feature **THE ADVENTURES OF ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE**.

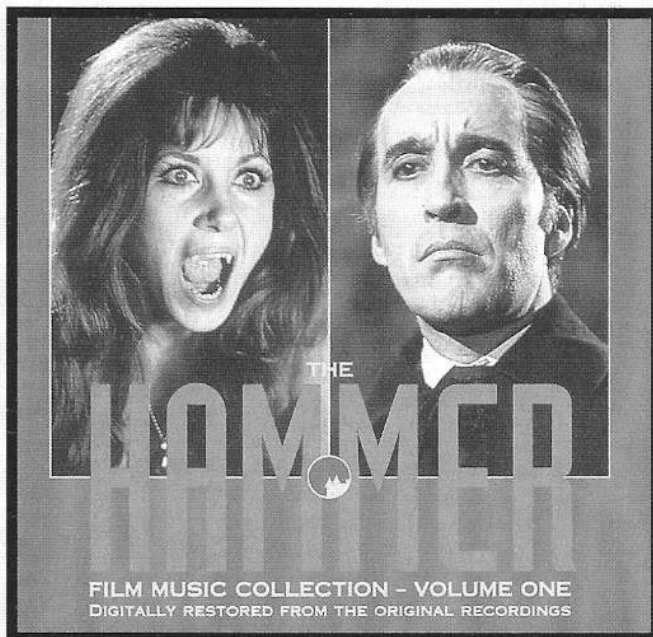
Sir Anthony Hopkins' announcement that he's giving up the acting profession casts serious doubts that he'll be returning to the role of Hannibal Lecter in **THE MORBIDITY OF THE SOUL**. Stay tuned.

Continued on page 17

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THE X-FILES

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Vol. 16: "Piper Maru" / "Apocrypha"

Vol. 17: "Pusher" / "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'"

Vol. 18: "Wetwired" / "Talitha Cumi"

FBI frightbusters Fox Mulder and Dana Scully (David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson) are back on laser in a new batch of criminally creepy cases from THE X-FILES' third season. Included in this assortment are a couple of the series' best stand-alone shows and an alien/conspiracy two-parter that puts a "slick" new twist in the mythology.

"Piper Maru" and "Apocrypha" introduce a brand new alien heavy—40-weight, actually—in the semblance of a black oil that creeps into people and possesses them. These "oilien," as X-fans have dubbed them, cover their hosts' eyes in an inky film that's one of the series' most subtle and effective special effects.

A French salvage ship, the Piper Maru, sends a diver to the depths of the Pacific to locate a downed World War II fighter plane. He discovers a shocking sight: an Allied pilot, still alive, banging on the window of the craft in an attempt to be freed. Shortly thereafter the diver resurfaces, telling his crewmates nothing of his discovery—or any explanation of the newly glistening black film over his eyes.

When the Piper Maru docks in San Diego with her crew dying inexplicably of radiation burns—save the diver, who simply walks away with a black-eyed scowl—Mulder and Scully find clues aboard the ship: a video of the sunken fighter plane, and the name of a WWII submarine scrawled on the ship's navigation map.

Even as THE X-FILES treads familiar territory, particularly within the

mythology arcs, the real fascination has become the character development of Mulder and Scully. Here again, Gillian Anderson is afforded a chance to shine in some well-written scenes. Scully returns wistfully to the Naval base where she grew up, to interview a retired Naval commander about the sub referred to on the Piper Maru. The commander tells a tale that leads the agents to discover the new breed of oily E.T.—a discovery that the shadowy Consortium would rather be kept buried at sea.

All our favorite conspiratorial bad guys are back in this tale: The Cigarette-Smoking Man, the Well-Manicured Man, the rotund First Elder (a.k.a. The Well-Fed Man), and "Ratboy" himself, renegade agent Alex Krycek (pictured below), who takes a well-deserved licking from Mulder but keeps on ticking with that newly-acquired oily-eyed sheen of his . . .

Screenwriter Vince Gilligan has become a fan favorite for his entertaining, intelligent X-FILES scripts, which invariably explore and advance the Scully/Mulder relationship. After a serviceable debut with the second season episode "Soft Light" (not yet available), Gilligan scored with "Pusher," an intense thriller that is one of the series' very best. In Virginia, police and FBI agents capture a man known as "Pusher," who has been taunting local authorities with calls claiming to be a hit man-for-hire. The details he provides of recent deaths—assumed to be suicides—lead the police to believe he knows too much to be innocent.

What the police—and our heroes—eventually come to believe is that Robert "Pusher" Modell has the ability to induce death in others by the sheer power of his voice and will. Modell eventually leads the agents into a battle of wits and to an edge-of-the-seat climax that surpasses many a feature film. Modell, as portrayed by actor Robert Wisden, was so memorably villainous that he was brought back in the show's fifth season for a repeat appearance.

Writer Darin Morgan—probably the most popular X-FILES scripter ever—delivered in the series' third season what he claimed to be his swan song, "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" a characteristic combination of intricate plotting, in-jokes, and broad humor. What he produced with this tale was not only unique for THE X-FILES, but unique among TV shows in general. Within his deliberately obscure plot, Morgan savagely spoofs the series and its stars, its fans and its fanatics, while cleverly and thoughtfully expanding the alien conspiracy plotline. Agent Scully is visited by Jose Chung, a noted novelist of con-

INSIDE THE X FILES

spiracy fiction, who quizzes the agent on the details of a supposed alien abduction case.

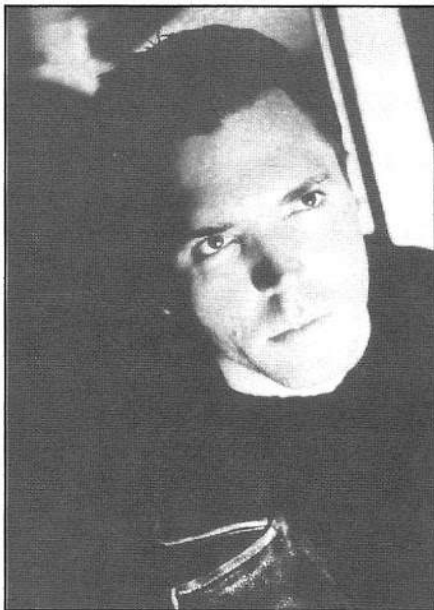
As the events of the case unfold from different points of view in conflicting flashbacks, we're treated to spoofs of new-age cults, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, Ray Harryhausen monsters, and the spurious "alien autopsy" video. Comic actor Charles Nelson Reilly was the surprisingly effective casting choice for writer Jose Chung in this wildly different episode that may be an acquired taste, but is quite tasty nevertheless.

The nasty effects of watching too much television are given the X-FILES treatment in "Wetwired," a grim entry that benefits from the direction of Rob Bowman, helmer of the X-FILES feature film. The agents investigate a series of suburban killings by people who seemingly become delusional and berserk after watching lots of cable TV. Mulder, with the assistance of conspiracy-headed helpmates The Lone Gunmen, discovers a secret signal fed into local cable transmissions. Scully, meanwhile, does some serious investigatory TV watching—and serious damage to her psyche, as she begins to believe that Mulder is a member of Cancer Man's murky minions. Added to the mix is a perilous appearance by the volatile Mr. X, the secret informant whose contempt for Mulder is as evident as his loyalties are obscure.

The collection ends, as all X-FILES seasons do, with a frustrating cliffhanger. "Talitha Cumi," the third-season finale, further embellishes the conspiracy angle and starts leaking concrete details of the colonization scenario that last summer's feature film effectively amplified.

A disturbed man begins shooting patrons in a fast-food restaurant. Suddenly, a serene, almost spiritual man in a business suit approaches the shooter, calming him. As police snipers take the gunman down, the man in the suit places his hand on the shooter's wound, healing him. The man in the suit vanishes from the scene, leaving police—and our hero agents—at a loss to investigate the mystical occurrence. A few days later, the man, who identifies himself as Jeremiah Smith, turns himself in to

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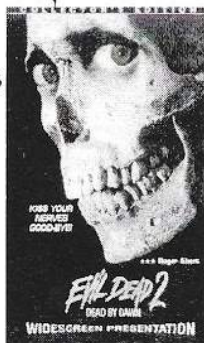
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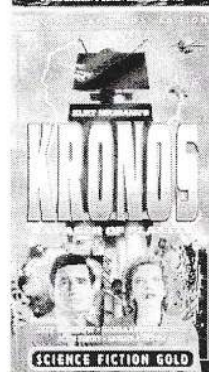
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SUPER SOUNDS

The Superman CD

How many different ways are there to score a man yelling "Up! Up! And away!" as he defies gravity and zips off into the stratosphere? Dozens, if the new Varèse Sarabande collection of music from Superman movies, serials, TV shows, cartoons, and Broadway musicals is any indication.

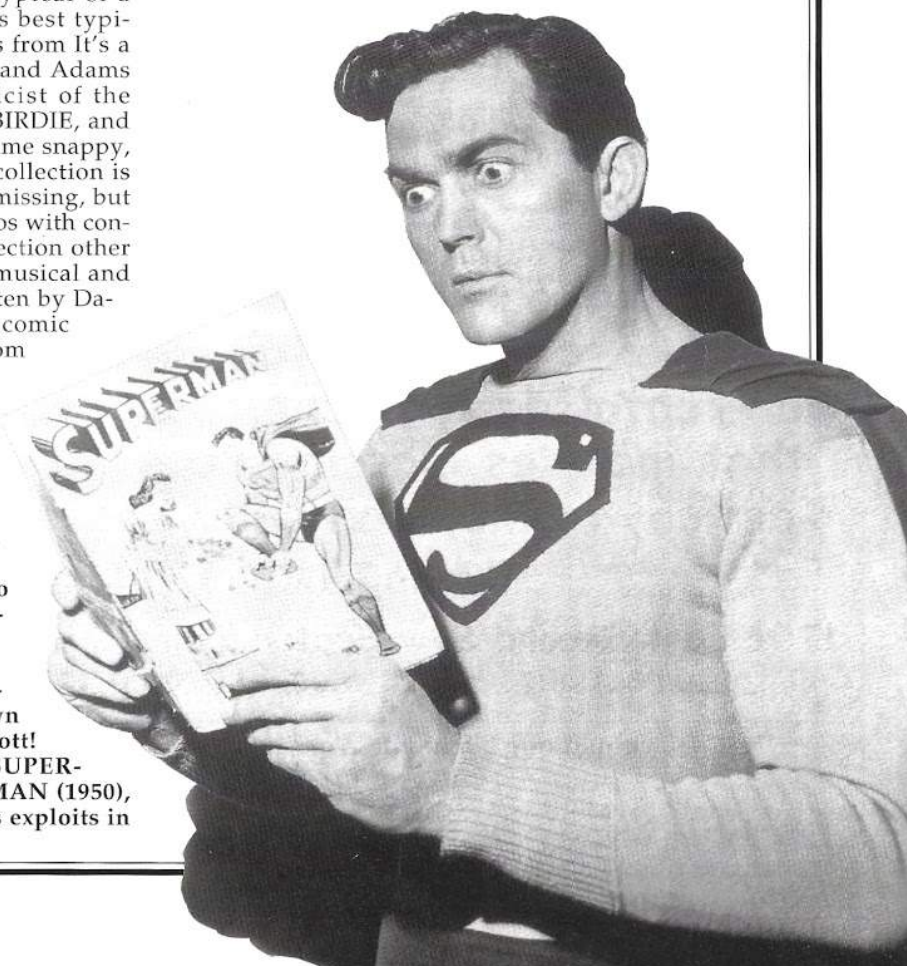
Conceived and produced by Bruce Kimmel, the 16 tracks that make up *SUPERMAN: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION* are culled from the classic Max Fleischer cartoons of the early forties (music by Sammy Timberg), the 1948 Columbia serial *SUPERMAN* (Mischa Bakaleinikoff), TV's *ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN* (Leon Klatzkin), 1978's *SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE* (John Williams), 1980's *SUPERMAN II* (John Williams/Ken Thorne), 1983's *SUPERMAN III* (Thorne/Williams), 1984's *SUPERGIRL* (Jerry Goldsmith), and the 1966 Broadway musical *IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S SUPERMAN!* (Charles Strouse and Lee Adams). Missing is music from the television shows *THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY* and *LOIS AND CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN*, and the exciting scores from the new Superman cartoons produced by Warner Bros., but there's always the possibility of a second volume.

Not only is the selection of movies, cartoons, and musicals refreshingly eclectic, but so is the music chosen by Kimmel, orchestrated by Donald Johnston, and conducted by Randy Miller. The compact disc has its full share of heroic marches and fight music, plus some beautiful variations on the love theme ("Can You Read My Mind?") used in *SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE* and *SUPERMAN II*, but there is also a sense of fun typical of a Kimmel-produced music collection, perhaps best typified by the cut "Phantasmagoria on Themes from It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman!" Strouse and Adams are best known as the composer and lyricist of the Broadway musical and film 1963 *BYE BYE BIRDIE*, and their *IT'S A BIRD . . .* score bounces to the same snappy, pseudo-rock 'n' roll beat. Since the present collection is entirely orchestral, Adam's lyrics are sadly missing, but they are clever and treat the Superman Mythos with considerable affection. (There's actually a connection other than Supes himself between the Broadway musical and the Superman movies: both had scripts written by David Newman and Robert Benton.) Another comic highlight is the cue "Honeymoon Hotel" from *SUPERMAN II*, used when Clark Kent and Lois Lane pretend to be newlyweds at Niagara Falls.

After *SUPERMAN: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION*, will it be long before we get *BATMAN: HIS LIFE IN MUSIC*?

—Richard Valley

TOP: Clark Kent (George Reeves) gets wind of criminal activity calling for him to drop in at the storage room on TV's *ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN*. **MIDDLE:** Supervillains from the planet Krypton (Sarah Douglas, Terence Stamp, and Jack O'Halloran) bust up a Midwestern American town in *SUPERMAN II* (1980). **RIGHT:** Great Scott! Kirk Alyn, star of the Columbia serials *SUPERMAN* (1948) and *ATOM MAN VS. SUPERMAN* (1950), is properly astonished by the Man of Steel's exploits in the comic books that first gave him fame.



NEWS HOUND

Continued from page 12

The recently completed script for the fourth Indiana Jones movie is rumored to be about the recovery of Excalibur, and may be titled INDIANA JONES AND THE SWORD OF ARTHUR. But that particular blade will have to stick The Hound in his furry butt before he believes this movie will ever get done.

Television Terrors

The Sci-Fi Channel has unfortunately dumped all of its informative magazine shows, but is premiering two original series starting Friday, March 19. FARSCAPE stars Ben Browder (PARTY OF FIVE) as a 20th-century astronaut catapulted light years from earth when a top-secret experiment goes awry (as most of them do). Now he's caught between warring alien races while figuring how to hitch a ride back home. Maybe he'll meet up with Arthur Dent along the way. FIRST WAVE, from executive producers Francis Coppola and Chris Brancato (ex of THE X-FILES), is a combo of THE FUGITIVE and THE INVADERS, in which aliens frame protagonist Cade Foster (Sebastian Spence) for the murder of his wife. Foster's on the run from the cops while seeking the real murderer: a little green one-armed man, who lost his limb in a Fox Network alien autopsy special. By the way, if your local cable system doesn't carry The Sci-Fi Channel, you can catch the premiere episodes of both these series in a USA Network sneak preview on Sunday night, March 14.

The folks at The Sci-Fi Channel have still more series in development. METROPOLIS, from former music video producer Spike Jonze, follows the adventures of two beat-walking cops who stumble across the paranormal more often than even Carl Kolchak ever did. Werewolves are the FORCE OF NATURE to be reckoned with in a new drama series, with a pilot episode directed by award-winning documentarian Barbara Kopple. And soon on view (but barely) will be H. G. Wells' transparent protagonist in an updated version of INVISIBLE MAN from writer Matt Greenberg, coscripter of feature films MIMIC and HALLOWEEN H20.

The Home Video Vault

Now available for rental are the Columbia-TriStar terror titles URBAN LEGEND, JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES, and the direct-to-video remake of CARNIVAL OF SOULS. They can also be purchased on DVD for \$24.98 each.

The Roan Group continues its terrific slate of Hammer Films releases with some sci-fi faves from the fifties: X THE UNKNOWN, QUATERMASS II, FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE and THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN OF THE HIMALAYAS. Each is available in a letterboxed edition on VHS for \$14.99, and on laserdisc for \$49.98.

Agatha Christie purists may flinch, but there's no denying that the quartet of comic mysteries starring the cantanker-

ous Margaret Rutherford as Miss Jane Marple is an entertaining bunch. MGM has released them all on laserdisc in two double-disc sets: MURDER, SHE SAID paired with MURDER MOST FOUL, and MURDER AT THE GALLOP teamed with series finale MURDER AHOY. Each two-disc set costs \$39.98.

Coming to video in March is the Universal scare sequel BRIDE OF CHUCKY (VHS rental, laserdisc \$34.98, DVD \$24.98). Other Universal DVD releases in March include the Chuckster's previous outing CHILD'S PLAY 2 (\$24.98), and Terry Gilliam's 12 MONKEYS (\$34.98).

Also arriving on DVD in March: Jamie Lee Curtis' return to slasherdom in HALLOWEEN H20 (\$29.99), and the bloody, dusty direct-to-video sequel FROM DUSK TILL DAWN 2: TEXAS BLOOD MONEY (\$39.98). Both Dimension/Buena Vista releases are also available on VHS for rental. And Fox Video doles out the disasters on DVD in March with THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE, THE TOWERING INFERNO, and VOLCANO. Each disc will shake \$29.98 out of your wallet.

The Hound's Maulbox

Ross Care, *Scarlet Street's* ever lyrical RECORD RACK columnist, E-mailed The Hound this query about a famed director gone AWOL:

"I'm curious. What is Ken Russell doing? (Whatever happened to Ken Russell???) I've asked this on several occasions, even to some people in England, and no one has ever come up with a concrete answer. (So maybe he's not doing anything.)"

Well, the Hound went directly to another *Scarlet Staffer*, Ken Hanke, who quickly replied:

I spoke with Ken Russell at his home in the New Forest in south England to find out just exactly what he's up to, and, as usual, he's deeply enmeshed in a number of projects. "I'm doing writing these days. I'm rewriting a script on J. M. Barrie's PETER PAN, and I might get the chance to direct it. It's just up my street!" Russell told me, adding, "I've been busy correcting the final proofs of my science fiction novel, *Space Gospel*. It's coming out in June." *Space Gospel* is drawn from an unproduced screenplay of Russell's and also incorporates dialogue from his more recent script, SON OF MAN, a somewhat cheeky life of Christ that nearly got made a couple of years ago. Russell is plainly delighted by the continuing release of his films on tape and disc and is optimistic about the possibility of Warners soon tackling THE DEVILS—"The full version—the full, full version." Before Russellphiles get too worked up, no, this does not mean the censored "Rape of Christ" scene will be included. That, according to Russell, is apparently lost, but it would be the film



Miss Marple is back in the formidable person of Margaret Rutherford. Her four Agatha Christie mysteries are due for release on laserdisc.

as it originally played in England, which is considerably longer than the US version and contains several alternate takes, as well. (By the way, Russell read Issue #30 of *Scarlet Street* and was very favorably impressed—"It was quite fun! I enjoyed that. I really liked your article. I thought it was very thorough, very penetrating.")

Send The Hound your questions, comments and compliments at TheNewsHound@yahoo.com.

The Weird Wide Web

British cinema scribe Marcus Hearn, co-author of the 1998 Titan Books tome *The Hammer Story*, manages the official Hammer Films website (<http://www.hammerfilms.com/>) . . . Hammer House of Horrors, a fan site created by Jim Rodkey of Pennsylvania, is also well worth a visit (<http://www3.leba.net/jrodkey/hammer02.html>).

The weird-science adventures of Professor Bernard Quatermass by sci-fi scribe Nigel Kneale are detailed on The Quatermass Home Page (<http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/8504/qhome.htm>) . . . Virginia resident Ken Yousten maintains a nice, fact-filled foray into the films of producer Val Lewton (<http://www.acm.vt.edu/yousten/lewtan/index.html>).

And don't forget to visit your favorite Magazine of Mystery and Horror in cyberspace at www.scarletstreet.com!

Gone, but never to be forgotten: Queen of Burlesque Ann Corio (for whom our Reditor worked in the late seventies), directors Alan J. Pakula, Don Taylor, and Buzz Kulik; producer Peter Cotes (THE MOUSETRAP), screenwriter/novelist Brian Moore, writer Eric Ambler, film composer John Addison, cinematographer Freddie Young, British media titan Lord Grade, BARBARELLA creator Jean-Claude Forest, and actors Hurd Hatfield, Richard Denning, Esther Rolle, Michael Zaslow, Ruth Clifford, Philip Sterling, Norman Fell, Iron Eyes Cody, Irene Hervey, Irene Vernon, Betty Marsden, Vincent Winter, Bobo Lewis, and Renaissance man and beloved *Scarlet* interviewee David Manners.



SCREEN...



and Screen AGAIN!



Scarlet Street's Laser Review

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL
Warner Home Video
Three Sides CLV
\$39.95

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL (1997) is a multi-textured adaptation of the penultimate novel of James Ellroy's L.A. Quartet. The books offered a putrescent portrait of corruption within the Los Angeles Police Department, circa 1942-1962. Graft, frame-ups, shakedowns, and abuses of power abounded in the department's activities. Along the way, Ellroy weaved real-life incidents into his fictional tapestries, such as the Robert Mitchum pot bust, the Black Dahlia murder, and the Zoot Suit riots.

The film version of L.A. CONFIDENTIAL picks up the narrative in 1951. The overlapping personal histories of three officers form the focus of the piece. Bud White (Russell Crowe) is a brute with a badge who uses his authority to avenge the savage killing of his mother, by "legally" assaulting men who mistreat women. Kevin Spacey's opportunistic Jack Vincennes is a media hound who simultaneously advises a sanitized DRAGNET-styled TV drama while dispensing lurid case particulars to the sensationalistic rag *Hush-Hush*. Ed Exley (Guy Pearce, from 1994's *THE ADVENTURES OF PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT*) dedicates himself to measuring up to the high standards established by his patrolman father. He's a do-gooder who fails to comprehend that the deck is stacked against him. The film pits these three protagonists against Ellroy's diseased universe, populated with gleeful tabloid hustlers (Danny DeVito), corrupt police officials (James Cromwell), and flesh peddlers (David Strathairn).

Director and co-scenarist Curtis Hanson has done a remarkable job of condensing a complex novel into a 138-

minute production. The labyrinthine procession of characters and events can be confusing to a first-time viewer; subsequent screenings help to clarify matters. Hanson has deleted certain subplots from the book, such as that of a Walt Disneyesque theme park entrepreneur who harbors a dark secret, but the director maintains the author's nihilistic study of the LAPD's inner workings.

The film, if anything, downplays the book's sleaze quotient. As a novelist, Ellroy takes pleasure in rubbing his readers' noses through the stench of human degradation. I rather missed his staccato pornographic riffs. Hanson's adaptation tends to highlight action sequences instead. However, the director also contributes a moral undercurrent. He takes several opportunities to com-

ment that the naive male and female hookers (Simon Baker Denny, Kim Basinger as a Veronica Lake lookalike) had journeyed to Hollywood with the best of intentions, before being swallowed by their only opportunities for "acting" jobs. That thread was discernible in Ellroy's prose, but Hanson emphasizes it more forcefully. The exploitation of the former innocents contributes pathos to the otherwise besmirched canvas of Los Angeles and its civic decay.

Warner's laserdisc of L.A. CONFIDENTIAL accurately captures its muted color scheme. The film's lighting design is indigenous to the subject matter and its set pieces, rather than being a self-conscious recreation of the stylized look of *film noir*. The letterboxing at 2:35-1 precisely displays the vintage movie theaters, restaurants, and rundown motels that lend a period flavoring. The handsome film is spread over three sides in the CLV format. Side Three provides a 19-minute behind-the-scenes documentary look at the project. Director Hanson, author Ellroy (a bit less over the top than usual), and cast members Spacey, Crowe, Pearce, Basinger, and DeVito are among the principals who discuss their individual perceptions of the production.

—John F. Black

BATMAN AND MR. FREEZE: SUBZERO
Warner Home Video
Side One CLV, Side Two CAV
\$34.98

Anybody who watches the "Dubba-Dubba" WB network's Saturday morning animated series *THE BATMAN/SUPERMAN ADVENTURES* knows one rather surprising fact: this weekly kids' show is consistently better than any of the recent big-screen, live-action Batman movies. *SUBZERO*, the second animated Batfeature from the makers of the series,



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takes that existing quality and spends a bit more money on it to give us the most satisfying Batman feature in a long time, with an exciting story, stunning visuals, and characters with depth and humanity. It's ironic that the live-action films seem to strive to be as cartoonish as possible, while the animated series and its related films take equal pains to be realistic and dramatic.

SUBZERO concerns famed Batvillain Mr. Freeze, who was turned into human Pop-Ice in a tragic accident while creating a cryogenic chamber to freeze his wife, Nora, who is suffering from a fatal disease. Though living peacefully in an arctic retreat (probably nowhere near Superman's Fortress of Solitude—they must have hero/villain zoning laws up there), another accident breaks Nora out of her cryo chamber, and an immediate organ transplant is required to save her life. This forces Mr. Freeze to don his cold suit, pack his freeze gun, take his two faithful polar bears (What else? Penguins were taken), and return to the world at large to seek a donor. The handiest prospect with the proper blood type, though she's inconveniently alive, is Police Commissioner Gordon's daughter, Barbara, who also happens to be Batgirl. (Yes, yes, Commissioner Gordon's daughter like it's been for 30 years, not Alfred's clueless niece like in that stupid movie.) Barbara is brazenly kidnapped while she's on a dinner date with Dick Grayson, aka the kid in the green jockey shorts, Robin the Boy Wonder, Batman's sidekick. Ah, it is a small world in Gotham, isn't it?

The middle of the film keeps us with Barbara Gordon and her plight—namely, trying to escape the clutches of Freeze. Separated from her Batgear and without the Caped Crusaders around to help her, she shows herself to be a courageous and resourceful hero. Happily for us, on the brink of escape the situation

turns, requiring the two stars to come to her aid in the third act, and we close the film with everybody joining the party for a spectacularly animated climax.

Mr. Freeze is voiced with eloquent menace by Michael Ansara. He is far from a cardboard cutout villain, having motivation and soul, and even a touch of humanity in the end. Other voice actors include series regulars Kevin Conroy as Batman, Loren Lester as Robin, and Efram Zimbalist as Alfred. Batgirl, once voiced by Melissa Gilbert in the series, is here played by Mary Kay Bergman, whose voice is well matched to that of the LITTLE HOUSE veteran.

The film has spectacular action scenes almost on a par with some of the best Japanese anime. Some scenes use computer-animated backgrounds, vehicles, lighting, and atmospheric effects, and while this has been done successfully in a lot of anime, it doesn't really work here—the technique is so glaringly different from regular animation that one can't help being distracted from the story while noticing the difference in surfaces and movement. Still, it isn't enough of a fault to detract from this otherwise exciting and highly enjoyable Batventure.

The 66-minute film is presented in 1.66:1 letterbox format on a single disk, with Side Two recorded in full-featured CAV for intricate dissection of the best animated parts.

—John E. Payne

THE BATMAN/SUPERMAN MOVIE:
WORLD'S FINEST
Warner Home Video
Side One CLV, Side Two CAV
\$29.98

Two times the action (it says on the jacket)! Two times the excitement! Two times the adventure! Appropriately subtitled **WORLD'S FINEST**, **THE BATMAN/SUPERMAN MOVIE** gives us an animated feature that is also two times—maybe five times—better than any live-action Batmovie has managed to be...

Batman's arch nemesis, The Joker (voiced by Mark Hamill), is strapped for ready cash, so he gets his hands on some Kryptonite and offers Superman's arch nemesis, Lex Luthor (voiced by Clancy Brown) a deal: for a billion bucks he'll kill the Man of Steel. Meanwhile, Batman (Kevin Conroy), in his civilian identity of millionaire Bruce Wayne, uses a business meeting with fellow industrialist Luthor as an excuse to follow The Clown Prince of Crime from Gotham to Metropolis. It's not long before Batman is on the streets hassling the local underworld for information. It's also not long before Superman (Tim Daly) takes exception to the Dark Knight's less-than-gentle methods of interrogation. Superman versus Batman would be a short fight, of course, if Batman didn't happen to have a piece of The Joker's stolen Kryptonite in an evidence bag. The two do not part as friends, and the confrontation sets up a

believable animosity and distrust between DC's two most famous heroes. To add interest to the relationship, they each discover the other's secret identity, letting the characters trade ironic witticisms at every possible occasion. And to complicate things even further, the woman of Superman's affections, Lois Lane (Dana Delany), falls head-over-heels in love with Bruce Wayne, who leaves Clark Kent at the starting gate in the suave race. The story very adeptly shows us the differences between not only Batman's and Superman's crime-fighting styles—as one would expect from a superhero cartoon—but it also addresses the differences in the two men's personalities. Though Superman and Batman realize they work well together, they don't play well together, and the understanding they come to is far from the friendship one would have expected from a less script.

While the plot is nothing more than a series of traps that our two superheroes must get themselves and each other (and



Lois) out of, the essence of the story is, believe it or not, the well-defined characters and their relationships (plus a lot of explosions for the kids). This film, like **BATMAN AND MR. FREEZE: SUBZERO** and the Saturday morning Batman/Superman cartoons, may be part of Warner Bros.'s Kids WB lineup, but it is eminently watchable for adult fans.

The animation style follows that of the later Batman/Superman TV episodes. The drawing style is more spare and blocky than first season episodes, and the quality of the animation itself varies a bit. Some scenes stutter with limited animation techniques while others, particularly the action scenes, come close to full animation. Unlike **SUBZERO**, there are no obvious computer effects or CG animation in this film, which is better for this kind of presentation. The film is only 61 minutes long, but only Side Two of the single laserdisc, where most of the action happens, is in CAV mode.

—John E. Payne

QUATERMASS II
The Roan Group
Side One CLV, Side Two CAV
\$49.95

A British counterpart to **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**, **QUATERMASS II** (U.S. title: **ENEMY FROM SPACE/1957**) comprises the second part of a Hammer trilogy chronicling the ad-

ventures of scientist Bernard Quatermass. **THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT (THE CREEPING UNKNOWN/1955)** made its laser debut in the **UNITED ARTISTS SCI-FI MATINEE VOL. 2** box set, while **QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH/1967)** has been issued by Elite.



The pre-credits sequence is washed-out, but the rest of the film sports excellent contrast and gray scale, with a transfer so sharp that areas of fine detail (such as pin-striped collars) break up into rainbow-like moiré patterns on my monitor. (This is easily ameliorated by reducing the color saturation.) Though slightly disruptive, the placement of the side break permits CAV presentation of Side Two, allowing for freeze frame examination of Les Bowie's matte paintings. The audio is clean, if somewhat recessed.

The Roan Group has provided a well-mounted presentation of a modest yet compelling essay in social science fiction that has never looked this good on video before.

—Michael Draine

THE X-FILES
20th Century Fox
Sides One and Two CLV,
Side Three CAV
\$39.98

Having just seen the funding pulled from his space colonization project, Professor Quatermass (Brian Donlevy) discovers a full-scale duplicate of his proposed moon base in the English countryside. Allegedly a factory for the manufacture of synthetic food, the high-security facility proves to be staffed by locals infected with an extraterrestrial virus that subjugates them to the alien life form's collective will. Swift pacing, eerily overcast B&W photography, and the use of a Shell Oil refinery as the alien headquarters all contribute to an unnerving documentary quality.

At the heart of Nigel Kneale's script lies an X-FILES-like distrust of government secrecy, which had become a concomitant of British society in WW II. Echoes of George Orwell's *1984* resound in a pub scene where unemployed construction workers shrug off the crash of an alien pod through the roof with a dismissive, "It's only an overshoot." This portrait of authoritarian manipulation of language to inculc complacency in an imperiled populace is in many respects the most chilling element of the film.

An impressive array of extras includes separate audio commentaries by director Val Guest and screenwriter Nigel Kneale, a reproduction of the British pressbook, and a dark, dupey American trailer. The puzzling similarity between Quatermass' planned moon base and the "synthetic food" plant is only made clear by the pressbook plot synopsis. (Both facilities are to maintain artificial atmospheres for the sustenance of alien life.)

There's a lot of dead time on the commentary tracks, as Guest frequently repeats his prompter's questions. Kneale reiterates his oft-voiced dissatisfaction with Brian Donlevy's jowly, hectoring Quatermass, but Guest praises Donlevy's earthy, authentic presence, while conceding the actor's constant on-set consumption of alcohol ("his plasma").

Unlike Gene Roddenberry's legendary STAR TREK franchise, Chris Carter's brainchild **THE X-FILES** makes the transition from TV to film with a remarkable degree of style, grace, and clarity. While geared more toward the X-Files in terms of plot and in-joke references, director Rob Bowman offers quite a bit for even the casual viewer of the TV show.

Subtitled in the pre-release ads as **FIGHT THE FUTURE** (a title that never shows up onscreen or on the video or laser jackets), the opening legend establishes the setting as "North Texas, 35,000 BC." We learn that Prehistoric Man had first encountered the mysterious "black oil," which is actually an advanced E.B.E. (That's Extraterrestrial Biological Entity, for all you newbies.) Immediately, the scene switches to North Texas in the present, where a young boy (Lucas Black) and some playmates stumble on the black oil and witness its frightening effects on the human anatomy.

FBI Agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully (David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson) have been yanked off the X-Files and are involved in an antiterrorism branch trying to diffuse a bomb in a Dallas office building. The bomb explodes, lives are lost, and the two agents find themselves bearing the brunt of the government's blame for the incident.

However, the lives that were lost were already lost, or so the neurotic Dr. Alvin Kurtzweil (Martin Landau, in a brief but wonderful performance) tells Mulder in a bar. This naturally piques Mulder's curiosity, so he and Scully disobey the orders of their peers and begin an investigation leading them to some horrifying truths—mainly, that the alien life forms forged a vile colonization pact with a shadowy conspiracy of key figures from world governments after WW II. Once again, it's up to Mulder and Scully to thwart the plans and attempt to discover "The Truth" while saving humanity.

Disappointingly, many of the regulars from the series find their roles displaced and, frankly, rather forced here. The Cigarette-Smoking Man (William B. Davis), The Well-Manicured Man (John Neville), Assistant FBI Director Walter Skinner (Mitch Pileggi), and The Lone Gunmen (Tom Braidwood, Bruce Harwood, Dean Haglund) all put in requisite appearances, but only Neville adds any significant degree of depth to the film's plot. The others, like Sulu and Uhura in the STAR TREK films, are relegated to being nothing more than set dressing.

Despite these flaws, the film truly lives up to its prerelease hype. Rob Bowman, a veteran director of at least 25 X-FILES episodes, delivers the goods—action, suspense, and the ever-present ambience making the viewer believe that things will only get worse. The difference here is that he has a much larger canvas for his portrait, and he uses it to his advantage. The ramifications of the plot are far more horrifying than the images shown to us, making **THE X-FILES** a wonderful experience that keeps the brain percolating for days afterward.

The 20th Century Fox laserdisc is letterboxed at 2.35:1, which perfectly enhances the stunning cinematography of Ward Russell. The transfer is very clear



and sharp. The sound is digitally mastered in THX.

Another unique trait to this splendid package is the inclusion of a few minutes of footage originally deleted from the film's theatrical release. Among this new footage is an extension of the conversation between The Well-Manicured Man and Mulder in the car. A very key piece of information is provided here, giving X-Files more insight than ever before into what really happened to Mulder's sister, Samantha.

—Brooke Perry

FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN
Elite Entertainment
Two Sides CLV
\$39.95

FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN (1967) was the third entry in the Hammer Films Frankenstein series to be

directed by Terence Fisher, following his *CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1957) and *THE REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1958). After Freddie Francis stepped in to helm *THE EVIL OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1964), Fisher resumed the Baron's saga.

FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN finds the titular scientist (Peter Cushing) furthering his research into the human condition. He has advanced considerably beyond the stitching of dismembered body parts; it's now the distillation of the soul itself that fuels his labors. The unjust guillotining of a young man, Hans (Robert Morris), coupled with the pathetic suicide of his crippled girlfriend, Christina (Susan Denberg), provide Frankenstein with the opportunity of advancing his experiments to a higher metaphysical plane. With the help of his Dr. Watsonesque assistant (Thorley Walters), the Baron succeeds in transferring Hans' soul into the repaired body of Christina. As in all things Hammer, the best intentions go frightfully wrong.

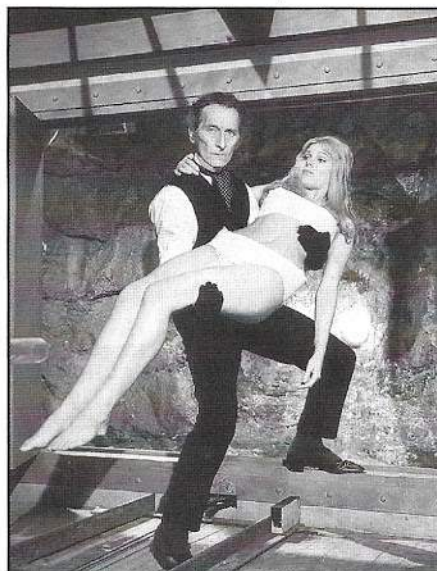
The real villains of the piece are a trio of local rakes, one of them enacted by Barry Warren (remembered for his portrayal of the mesmerizing, ivory-tickling vampire from Hammer's *KISS OF THE VAMPIRE*/1963). On their best day, they're hard-drinking louses who peddle intimidation to "settle" their accounts. At their worst, they're burglars who resort to murdering Christina's father when he surprises them in his cafe. In contrast, Frankenstein is obsessed with his vision of the perfection of mankind, the body and the soul. The homicidal split personality that results from the transference is an unintended by-product of his experiment.

Susan Denberg is surprisingly effective as the unfortunate Christina, never betraying her Playboy Playmate pedigree. She's credible as the shy young woman imprisoned by her disfigured body, and equally arresting as the repackaged siren who seeks revenge on the trio who have wronged her and Hans. The two sequences in which she "converses" with his severed head constitute memorable images in the Hammer canon. Reportedly, Denberg herself was an eventual suicide, macabre considering that her character commits the act twice during this film.

FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN is arguably the most eccentric entry in the studio's Frankenstein series. The cast is uniformly excellent, sparked by the return of Terence Fisher. Fisher is typically more intrigued by the ramifications of the Baron's experiments than with their nuts-and-bolts mechanics, a trait which was evident as early as his *FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE* (1953). However, he stops short of exploring the implications of transmitting a man's soul into the body of a femme fatale. The new he/she Christina entices and slaughters the three tormentors in rapid fashion before conveniently committing suicide.

I'd prefer that Christina survived, forcing him/her (as well as the Baron) to confront much more than the modest act of taking revenge.

Elite Entertainment's laserdisc provides a lustrous showcase for the film. The colors are noticeably lighter than some other Elite transfers, which should



please those who felt that their previous Hammer discs appeared overly dark. The image is displayed at 1:66-1, and is virtually free of visual artifacts and flaws. There is, unfortunately, a complete loss of sound for two seconds in Chapter Four (did somebody step on the audio cable?), which mars an otherwise excellent presentation. The laser concludes with several trailers: a hyperbole-ridden theatrical preview; a combo for *FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN* and its cofeature, *THE MUMMY'S SHROUD* (also available from Elite); and several shorter black-and-white television spots for the Fox double-bill.

—John F. Black

**THE BAT WHISPERS/
THE BAT**
The Roan Group
Three Sides CLV
\$69.95

The Roan Group's double-feature of *THE BAT WHISPERS* and *THE BAT* is a welcome treat that also provides an interesting study in contrasts.

First up is Roland West's *THE BAT WHISPERS*. West actually made this movie three times. Initially, he made a silent version in 1926 simply titled *THE BAT*. In 1930, he directed two versions of *THE BAT WHISPERS*, one in 35mm (released on laser in 1991 by Image), the other, utilizing the same cast and crew, in 65mm (and available now for the first time in this widescreen laser release).

For reasons which elude me, this film has undeservedly received poor reviews for being an archaic old dark house thriller, when in fact the source material it is based on (Mary Roberts Rinehart &

Avery Hopwood's 1920 play *THE BAT*) preceded the original play *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* by two years, and West's silent version of *THE BAT* made it to the screen a year prior to Paul Leni's classic film version of *THE CAT AND THE CANARY*.

THE BAT WHISPERS is a fun, shadow-filled thriller involving a haunted house of sorts, stolen bank funds, a sharp-tongued matron, her jittery housemaid, enough supporting characters to fill the rooms, and an eerie, murderous criminal lurking in the shadows... the Bat! Grayce Hampton plays Cornelia Van Gorder, the matron renting the house. Maude Eburne is featured opposite her as housemaid Lizzie Allen. Together their repartee, buoyed by Eburne's hysterical blubbing in response to unexpected faces and noises, provides the bulk of the laughs. Meanwhile, Chester Morris, as the tough Detective Anderson, roams in and around the property attempting to unveil the mysterious events taking place.

West experiments with an assortment of camera angles and unique viewpoints, including an opening sequence containing a most ambitious shot utilizing impressive miniatures and fluid camera work. Another particularly notable sequence is shot from above the Bat as he's perched in a tree, about to swoop down on his unsuspecting victim.

Those curious as to the differences between the 35mm and 65mm versions get a brief comparison at the end of the movie. Several changes enhance the atmosphere of the 65mm version substan-



tially. The most obvious one occurs during the scene in which a bank robber, in order to elude the Bat, engages a device to create a smoke plume behind his car. The 35mm version contains only a small amount of smoke thwarting the Bat. In the 65mm version, the smoke churns and coils into a heavy fog that enshrouds the Bat's vehicle.

The second feature is the 1959 Liberty Pictures remake, *THE BAT*, starring Vincent Price and Agnes Moorehead. Sup-

posedly a faithful adaptation of the original play, it lacks the tension and eeriness of *THE BAT WHISPERS*. The amusing interplay between Cornelia (now a mystery writer) and Lizzie is nonexistent. Also missing is any creative use of the camera or set. Crane Wilbur directs most of the scenes without building much suspense. (Oddly enough, the film plays as if it were a hour-long TV episode of *BEWITCHED* with Moorehead as a magic-impaired Endora.)

Moorehead and Price are well worth watching, but the supporting cast, with the exception of John Sutton, do little with their roles. Gavin Gordon, as Detective Anderson, is especially unconvincing. Price easily steals every scene he appears in simply through the expressive use of his eyes, voice, and body language. Were it not for his performance, there would be little to recommend this remake.

Both films are crisp, clean transfers. *THE BAT WHISPERS* is presented in a 2.2:1 aspect ratio, while *THE BAT* is 1.66:1. They are packaged in a beautiful gatefold sleeve that opens to display cast, credits, and chapter stop information, along with six photographs.

—Michael D. Walker

EXCALIBUR

Image Entertainment
Three Sides CLV
\$39.95

Noble knights in shining armor. Mysterious wizards uttering arcane chants. Honor and betrayal. Good and evil. The greatest quest of Western legend. Lotsa men hacking each other apart with big sharp things! Filmed in the lush wilds of Ireland and scored with a stirring selection of Germanic orchestrations, John Boorman's take on the legend of King Arthur is filled with splendor enough to sate any filmgoing sensualist.

Nigel Terry gave such a successfully repulsive performance as Prince John in *THE LION IN WINTER* (1968) that I had trouble at first accepting him as King Arthur. He nevertheless does a creditable job as the legendary monarch, despite his less-than-legendary looks. That most lovely of queens, Guinevere, is portrayed by Cherie Lunghi, whose tiny frame and doe eyes also seem, at first, against type. However, both actors easily muster enough regality to carry off their parts and help transport us to another time and another world. (Someone else must have thought Terry and Lunghi's chemistry was good in *EXCALIBUR*, because they were once again cast as king and queen in the 1992 TV series *COVINGTON CROSS*, a fairly lame attempt at a medieval teen angst show centering on their royal kids). Nicholas Clay provides the embodiment of Lancelot, the chaste knight who falls in love with his King's queen and triggers all their downfalls. The mysterious wizard Merlin, whose machinations both serve and drive the story, is played by Nicol Wil-

liamson as sometime-teacher, sometime-clown, and sometime-demon. Williamson comes close to going over-the-top in many scenes, but he is nevertheless the most entertaining—and dangerous—character in the film. Helen Mirren is delectable as Morgana, Arthur's half sister and nemesis, an evil sorceress who is after Merlin's power for herself, and Arthur's kingdom for her son Mordred (Robert Addie), the wicked little bastard she tricked Arthur into fathering.

In minor roles are some actors who would go on to be more bankable later in their careers, including a pre-*STAR TREK* (but still bald) Patrick Stewart as Guinevere's rather loud father, Leondegrance; Liam Neeson as Sir Gawain, a knight of the Round Table; and Gabriel Byrne as Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon, whose lust for power and another King's queen starts the sword-in-the-stone rolling.

The art direction, photography, scenery and soundtrack in *EXCALIBUR* are nothing short of breathtaking. The deep greens of Ireland's mist-shrouded forests and stark, rocky, open hills accent Arthur's credo that "The land and the King are one." *Excalibur* itself is always lit with a subtle jade glow, tying the sword and the king to the land. If you're not impressed enough visually, you can't help but be affected by the somber strains of Richard Wagner's "Siegfried's Funeral March," his beautiful prelude to *TRISTAN AND ISOLDE*, caressing the lovers Lancelot and Guinevere as they meet in the forest, or the rousing call-to-arms of Carl Orff's "Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi" gloriously backing Arthur's—and the land's—return to health and power after the Holy Grail is found.

Purists will note that the story line is not purely taken from its quoted source

material, Malory's *The Death of Arthur*. Rather it's a fusion of the Arthurian legends of Malory, de Troyes, Tennyson, Elliot, White, et al. This results in a certain chopiness to the narrative, but it does more to enhance the experience than lessen it. We are, after all, being told the story of a man's entire life. History buffs will chafe at many an anachronism. Sixth-century knights had chain mail, scale, and leather to cover them in battle, while Boorman's knights are clad in chromed, mirror-polished, full-body suits of plate armor that wouldn't exist for another thousand years or so. Oddly enough, *MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL* (1975) had more accurate costuming (and makes a perfect double feature)! Boorman doesn't present us with an "historical" piece, but rather a piece of mythology. Mood is far more important to *EXCALIBUR* than accuracy to any given source, and the film is the better for it.

But if, after all, you still aren't moved by *EXCALIBUR*, you can make a drinking game of spotting the camera crew reflected in the knights' armor, Morgana's breastplates, and Merlin's silly little bullet-cap. You'll be blotto before the side change

—John E. Payne

I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE

Paramount
Two Sides CLV
\$34.95

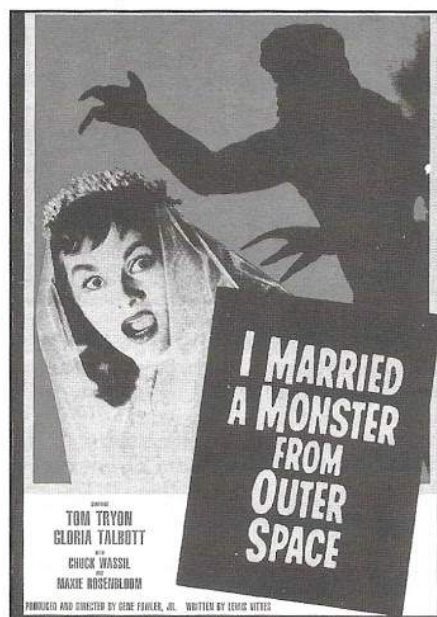
I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE (1958), pulpy title and all, is an entertaining, low-budget sci-fi drama. Tom Tryon stars as Bill Farrell, a man being feted on the eve of his nuptials by his young married chums, none of whom would rather be home with their wives. On his way home, his body is possessed by an alien creature that appears to have a Ping-Pong ball in its mouth. The newly constituted Bill is a quick study, brilliantly imitating terrestrial masculine responses. ("Why do we have to talk?")

His bride, Marge, played by Gloria Talbott, soon perceives his sullen, uncommunicative mood. Like any good housewife, she blames herself for his lack of intimacy. But when he begins to take ominous midnight excursions to a sequestered spaceship, Marge resolutely contacts local authorities. You know what's coming: the police themselves have already been ding-donged by the Ping-Pong People. Soon, telephone and telegraph services are rendered impotent as well. Marge influences a trusted family friend to round up a posse of heretofore uncontaminated men. A couple of their dogs vanquish the invaders, restoring the earthmen to their former level of consciousness.

The leading performances provide the necessary credibility. Bill's jovial party persona quickly hardens into ice after his ambush. Toward the conclusion, how-



ever, the alien Bill projects a slight warming to the notion that his race will be able to impregnate earthwomen. He sincerely opines that his people will inherit some semblance of human emo-



tions during the process. Marge effectively represses her emotional reactions before summoning the strength to rise above her innate insecurity. A few of the supporting elements are not as tellingly realized. Portraying a bartender, legendary boxer Maxie Rosenbloom throws a couple of pathetically pulled punches. The German shepherds utilized by the posse walk distractedly through the woods, clearly not on the scent of anything at all.

The film bears a superficial resemblance to Don Siegel's *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS* (1956), but is never as unsettling. The horror of Siegel's vision was having everyone (men, women, and children) taken over by the fugitives from the "exploding sun, dying planet" syndrome. Even its studio-imposed "happy" ending was muted, leaving the sanctioned Dr. Miles Bennell with truckloads of pods to intercept. *I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE* provides a more reassuring finale, with the fairy-tale restoration of the earthmen's bodies and souls.

It's trendy to regard many of the fifties cinematic fantasies as representing fables about cold war paranoia. (Some even suspect that the "T" in 1953's *THE 5,000 FINGERS OF DR. T* symbolizes totalitarianism.) However, with director Gene Fowler Jr. (1957's *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF*) at the helm, this one is primarily an entertainment. On that level it certainly succeeds, with earnest performances and understated special effects.

Paramount's laserdisc edition is acceptable, given the title's vintage and its low-budget origin. The source print tends to be on the dark side, evidencing

some slight grain, but is otherwise free of visual blemishes. The sound is a bit low, and suffers a brief dropout when a barfly mistakenly propositions a hooded alien. Both sides of the disc are presented in the CLV format, despite the label, which claims that Side Two is in CAV. There aren't any extras supplied pertaining to the film itself. However, Side Two concludes with four trailer previews that form a Paramount product reel, including *WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE* (1951), *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS* (1953), *BARBARELLA* (1968), and *THE KEEP* (1983).

—John F. Black

STARSHIP TROOPERS

Columbia/Tristar

Sides One, Three, and Four CLV

Side Two CAV

\$49.95

Take Robert Heinlein's classic and controversial 1959 novel, toss away all but a token mention of the book's primary focus on sociological discussion, cast a swarm of glossy *BEVERLY HILLS 90210* fashion dolls, and view through the lens of Paul Verhoeven's childhood in the burning streets of wartime Amsterdam. What have you got? Another mindless, violent, pointless, vacuous, summer mass-market joyride.

Forget socialist theory, forget power armor, forget character—it's not in this film. Heinlein's intelligent discussion of a society that requires military service for full citizenship and voting privileges is reduced to a throwaway plot setup in the film version. It provides a reason for the beautiful young people of Buenos Aires to sign up for Earth's military, go off into space to fight the alien enemy "bugs," and provide us with two hours of blood and goo. That people from Argentina are played by blue-eyed, white-bread Hollywood types is merely another disbelief among so very many to suspend. Our hero, stunning young football star Johnny Rico (Casper Van Dien), rebels against his father's plans for his future and signs up in the service. He does this mostly to follow the cute-as-a-bug woman he loves, Carmen (Denise Richards), who doesn't love him and who, despite her elevator-doesn't-quite-reach-the-top expression, we are supposed to believe is a math whiz. (Carmen, with her big blue eyes, reminds me of a pickup line a friend of mine once came up with: "Your eyes go on forever . . . all the way into that empty fucking head of yours." My friend doesn't date much.) Sadly for our hero, Carmen gets to be a starship pilot while Johnny only qualifies as bug food. But signing up in the infantry with him is Diz (Dina Meyer), the girl who really loves Johnny, although he can't see it 'cause Carmen has bigger tits (as we find out in the coed shower scene). But never mind all that relationship stuff; as soon as it's established it's thrown to the wind. The rest is a spe-

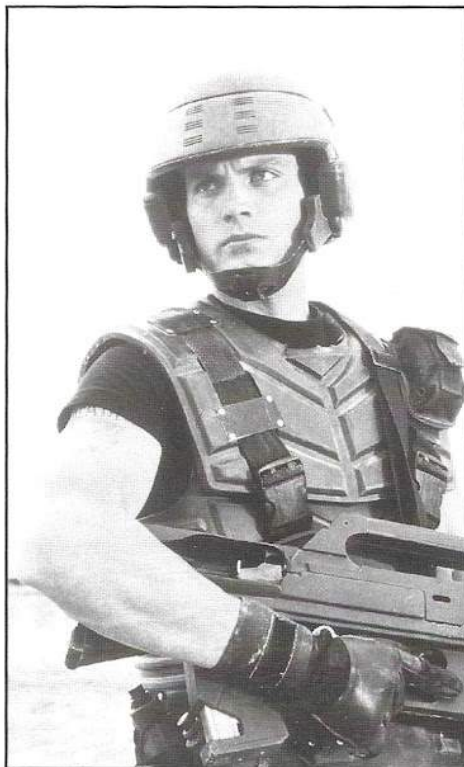
cial-effects fest of machine guns, spaceships, body parts, explosions, and some truly amazing computer-generated giant insects. Sound and fury, baby!

Verhoeven's films, such as *ROBOCOP* (1987) and *TOTAL RECALL* (1990), have a tendency to exceed even my liberal gore and violence threshold. (How we got through 1992's *BASIC INSTINCT* without a decapitation, I don't know.) Verhoeven, who was a child in Holland when the Nazis were bombing it into rubble, was once quoted as saying, "When I close my eyes, I see fire." He works out this trauma in his films, giving us scenes that are more suited to the atmosphere of *DAWN OF THE DEAD* than space opera. Do not watch this film while eating, say, lasagna.

Still, if it's a no-brainer effects fest you're looking for, look no further. I didn't say it wasn't entertaining; just plotless and gross. Phil Tippet's giant CG bug soldiers are startlingly believable (except maybe the ones that shoot down spaceships with blobs of plasma shot out of their asses), and the blending of live action and digital imagery is seamless. In one scene, personnel carriers land vertically from orbit, their ramps open, hundreds of soldiers pour out, and the shot pulls back to cover the whole landing zone. As many times as I've run that shot, I still can't tell if it uses digital or physical models or where they give over to live sets.

This deluxe widescreen (1.85:1) laserdisc features alternate scenes and behind-the-scenes featurettes on Side Four, and a running commentary by the filmmakers on the left analog audio track.

—John E. Payne

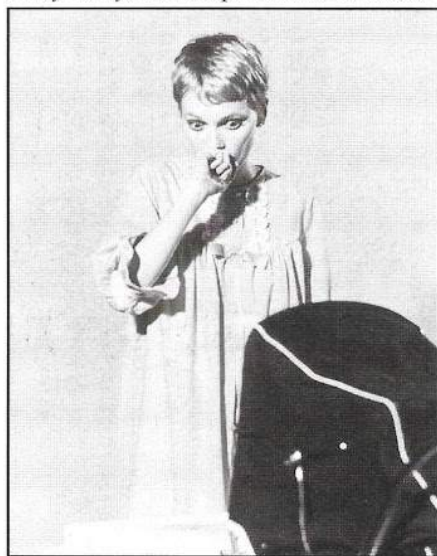


ROSEMARY'S BABY
Paramount
Three Sides CLV
\$35.96

Despite its unceremonious placement on *Harvard Lampoon's* list of Ten Worst Pictures of its year, *ROSEMARY'S BABY* (1968) is now regarded as a modern horror classic. Schlockmeister William Castle acquired Ira Levin's novel, remaining as producer. Fortunately, he was persuaded by Paramount honchos to hire another director, and chose Roman Polanski. Polanski eschewed special effects for the most part, other than creating symbolic imagery for Rosemary's dream sequences.

The story begins with Rosemary (Mia Farrow) and her struggling actor husband, Guy (John Cassavetes), leasing a Manhattan apartment in spite of its peculiar history. They are soon befriended by a batty neighbor couple (Ruth Gordon and Sidney Blackmer), who are practicing members of a witches' coven. The Devil has decided to procreate a child, with Rosemary selected to be the vessel. Guy willingly joins the unholy alliance in return for professional success. Rosemary eventually attempts to flee, but there are too many forces against her.

Polanski employs few optical effects to tell the tale. *ROSEMARY'S BABY* is reliant on the strengths of its characterizations to maintain audience attention. Farrow projects a healthy and vital young woman at the outset. The gradual deterioration of her appearance is painful to watch, as her countenance begins to mirror the inner trauma that her body and soul are undergoing. The director has also forcefully cast against type in assembling his cadre of cultists. The actors chosen were familiar to moviegoers predominantly for affability. Ruth Gordon, Sidney Blackmer, Ralph Bellamy, Patsy Kelly, and Hope Summers would-



n't normally inspire terror in anyone. In fact, their folksy personas suggest the outside possibility that Rosemary is ov-

erreacting to her first pregnancy. The use of these players also renders their betrayal of Rosemary subversive. If these seemingly benevolent individuals can victimize her, then nobody can be trusted.

Ruth Gordon won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her showy performance as the tannis-dispensing busybody, Minnie. In spite of her citation, Minnie's husband, Roman, and the enactment of it by Sidney Blackmer, is film's most intriguing character.

Being the warlock, he's the closest disciple to Satan in the coven, but he masks that relationship with his outward congeniality. The majority of Blackmer's dialogue can be interpreted in two different ways; what seems genteel often camouflages a menacing subtext. When not utilizing such conversational double entendres, however, Roman is a disarmingly sensitive man. Whenever Rosemary instinctively feels manipulated by Guy, Minnie, or her doctor (Bellamy), Roman immediately perceives her resistance and acts to defuse the tension. When her climactic entrance into the coven's hidden nursery suggests a possible threat, Roman intuitively understands that her natural mothering instincts will supersede any revulsion with her offspring's abnormalities (aberrations which Polanski has craftily suggested to the audience via subliminal nightmare imagery and dialogue, rather than graphic makeup effects). Blackmer's subtlety is as memorable as Gordon's humorously gesticulated portrayal. It's amusing, given contemporary times, that Roman's pierced ears suggest a hint of the macabre to Rosemary. Such an observation would hardly raise pierced eyebrows today.

Pioneer/Paramount have rereleased *ROSEMARY'S BABY* in a remastered widescreen edition. The color levels are considerably brighter than the previous laserdisc. The 1:85-1 aspect ratio is preferable for showing off the expansive sets. The source print used is in excellent condition, evidencing only one brief reel-change marking. No supplements have been included. A Roman Polanski audio commentary track would have made this an even more special release. Still, the overall quality is exceptional—so much so, in fact, that I wish that more titles from this studio's library would receive such high caliber spotlighting.

—John F. Black

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME
Turner Home Entertainment/Image
Three Sides CLV
\$19.99

Of all the filmmakers from Hollywood's Golden Era, perhaps the only one yet to be discovered and reevaluated



is William Dieterle, whose lack of a strong reputation is perhaps explained by his too close association with three Paul Muni films in the (often unfairly) disdained realm of the biopic, *THE STORY OF LOUIS PASTEUR* (1936), *THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA* (1937), and *JUAREZ* (1939), and two more such, *DR. EHRLICH'S MAGIC BULLET* and *A DISPATCH FROM REUTERS* (both 1940), with Edward G. Robinson. This is too bad, for not only are Dieterle's biopics better than their reputation suggests, but they are hardly representative. A better sampling of Dieterle's filmography would include *THE LAST FLIGHT* (1931), *SIX HOURS TO LIVE* (1931), *JEWEL ROBBERY* (1932), *SCARLET DAWN* (1932), *MADAME DU BARRY* (1934), *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* (1934), and *THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER* (1941), not to mention the glorious romanticisms of *LOVE LETTERS* (1945) and *PORTRAIT OF JENNIE* (1948). This more complete view of Dieterle at his best suggests a filmmaker of considerable power and personal vision. At his best, Dieterle is equal to another Warner Bros. director, Michael Curtiz—and at his worst, no worse than Curtiz.

Anyone wishing to reconsider Dieterle can do no better than to start with his 1939 film of *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*, a truly beautiful work on which Dieterle's contribution has been overshadowed by the admittedly wonderful performance of star Charles Laughton. It is the logical film—along with the unjustly forgotten historical romp *MADAME DU BARRY*—to bridge the gap between Dieterle's biopics and the rest of his work, dealing as it does with at least one historical character, Louis XI (Harry Davenport).

The first thing that one notices about Dieterle's film (beyond Laughton's performance) is that the director brings just as much attention and detail to the non-Laughton scenes, despite having to overcome the rather colorless playing of Edmond O'Brien as the romantic lead. In this, Dieterle had the distinct advantage of a dream supporting cast, including the aforementioned Harry Davenport, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Thomas Mitchell,

Minna Gombel, and the always amusing Etienne Girardot, along with the utterly luminous young Maureen O'Hara in her Hollywood debut. Nonetheless, it is much more a filmmaker's film than an actor's film and it is the masterful way Dieterle moves from broadest spectacle to scenes of simple intimacy that lingers in the mind long after specific performances have faded from memory. One has only to view Quasimodo's rescue of Esmeralda to know beyond question that this breathtaking amalgam of camera-work, editing, and sound (or actually silence in this case) is the work of a master, a genuine romantic with a flair for beautifully-done drama.

The new Turner laserdisc release of *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* is an almost flawless transfer that errs only in the decision to spread the film over three sides—an unnecessary move designed to make the third disc consist of something more than the supplemental material of a trailer and a very interesting interview with Maureen O'Hara, who makes numerous interesting observations about the film and its making. What is hardest to understand about the presentation, however, is the apparent desire to make the discs resemble a presentation on Turner Classic Movies! Not only does the film use a typical TCM Robert Osborne introduction, but it contains all the usual logos and even a promo for TCM by Bill Cosby at the end of the disc! It raises the question as to whether owning the disc is all that preferable to a good off-the-air copy of the film via digital cable or satellite. The disc is undeniably great looking, but whether it is better enough to warrant the expense is a question that can only be answered by the individual collector.

—Ken Hanke

HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL
Warner Home Video
Side One CLV, Side Two CAV
\$34.98

Stop me if you've heard this one—a reclusive millionaire invites several strangers, each with something to hide, to spend a night together in an isolated mansion that boasts a notorious history. The assorted guests are each promised a handsome sum, provided they are still alive to collect it the following morning. That plot device is an old chestnut that dates back to silent haunted-house melodramas and Agatha Christie novels, but producer/director William Castle managed to inject a few new wrinkles into the formula for his spooker *HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL* (1958).

Host Frederick Loren and his wife Annabelle (Vincent Price and Carol Ohmart) are a superficially functioning married couple. Their constant bickering, however, creates a palpable undercurrent of tension that permeates the night's festivities. Although their guests are bedeviled by dripping blood, apparitions, and stray body parts, it's plain that

villainy is afoot. Both of the Lorens have an ax to grind, and neither cares enough about appearances to camouflage their mutual animosity. Price and Ohmart are both excellent at conveying a level of hostility not quite masked by icy civility. They are supported by Richard Long as the nominal hero, and Carolyn Craig as a "love interest" who's neither lovely nor interesting.

Director Castle utilizes the house itself as a major component of his production. The exterior facade, a Frank Lloyd Wright house, is suitably forbidding (suggesting the ambience of a condemned shopping mall). The interior Hollywood sound stages are equally atmospheric, decorated with such bric-a-brac as a Viking drinking horn. There's always some intriguing object d'art visible in every camera setup.

Castle cleverly managed to sneak a consideration past the Production Code moralists of the day, who were no doubt distracted by the filmmaker's stylistic



gimmickry. At the climax, Frederick Loren successfully engineers the premeditated killing of his wife. The stunned surviving guests, who arrive just after the murder, seem placated by his self-serving conclusion that he's "ready for justice to decide if he's innocent or guilty." Loren then calmly walks out of the cellar unattended, under no discernible threat of possible repercussions! The visitors remain behind as the house owner (the quintessentially quirky Elisha Cook Jr.) delivers a rambling monologue about the supernatural.

Image's laserdisc edition of *HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL* is pleasing, if not quite perfect. The print has been matted at 1:78-1, displaying a sliver more visual information on the right side of the frame, while slightly cropping the top. The focus offers sharper definition than its VHS counterpart, although black-and-white contrast levels are somewhat subdued. There are very occasional stray marks and artifacts, but the vintage materials are in good shape overall. This release is superior to the old CBS/Fox pressing that double-billed the title with *ATTACK OF THE 50 FT. WOMAN*

(1958, now scheduled for an Image remastering of its own), although the bare bones package contains no Emergo skeleton or other supplements.

—John F. Black

THE BLACK SCORPION
Warner Home Video
Two Sides CLV
\$34.98

THE BLACK SCORPION (1957) is a standard giant bug film (if such a thing exists). The plot should sound familiar to fans of the genre: Geologists investigating a new volcano in Mexico encounter a demolished ranch and a smashed police car, the policeman mysteriously dead and his gun emptied. There are unidentifiable giant footprints, animal mutilations, and a strange poison in the bodies, yadda yadda yadda . . . If the viewer finds himself getting flashes of *deja vu* after about 10 minutes, it's because a great deal of the story line of the film is cloned, if in a slightly mutated form, from the much better giant bug film (if such a thing exists) *THEM!* (1954).

The plot tries to build suspense through the usual investigations of odd happenings and visits to eccentric local scientists, but it's pretty futile, since any mystery there could be as to the cause of the local carnage is destroyed by the film's title. Almost as if the movie were as tired of waiting as we are, two telephone linemen are abruptly attacked by some giant scorpions the size of railroad cars. The monsters are fine stop-motion effects supervised by KING KONG animator Willis O'Brien himself, but somewhere along the line in the production something went wrong. The editing is not very good, the sound effects are lifted directly from the ants in *THEM* with an annoying roar overlaid, and there is an overdependence on closeups of a drooling scorpion-face puppet that is just shy of laughable. One doesn't have to be too close an observer, either, to spot numerous repetitions of animation to save money. For instance, in the film's best effects scene, a swarm of giant scorpions emerges from the ground and attacks a train. The swarm is an obvious repeat of a shot from earlier in the film. With the train wrecked, the scorpions begin savaging the passengers. Well, passenger—the same distinctive animation of two of the arachnids fighting over one victim is used three times within the scene. Nowhere is it more obvious that the production ran out of money than in the scenes that attempt to mimic the city-street rampage from *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* (1953); the monster is represented only by the transparent black traveling matt! Hence the title, I guess . . .

As usual, bullets and bombs can't stop the creatures, but the biggest scorpion obligingly kills all the others. When he's all that's left, our heroes lure him into a stadium a la 20 MILLION MILES TO

Continued on page 74

Our Man on Baker Street

by David Stuart Davies

A Story of The London Fog: Hitchcock's Template

Happy Birthday, Sir Alfred! Indeed, if he were alive today that portly filmmaker with the instantly recognizable profile and sepulchral voice, who developed his own distinctive style of movie thriller, would be a hundred years old this year. I thought it would be interesting to go back to the beginning and consider the movie in which the Hitchcockian stamp first appeared.

Though by 1926, Alfred Joseph Hitchcock had worked on three films, he regarded *THE LODGER* as "my first picture." Film scholars agree, for it is within this silent feature that we see themes and innovative ideas that the director was to include and develop in many of his later films. Here these elements are in their experimental stage, but they are nevertheless inimitably Hitchcockian.

The plot of the movie, based on a novel of the same name by Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes, is simple to relate. London is being terrorized by a serial killer calling himself *The Avenger*—a creature based, no doubt, on Jack the Ripper. He murders blonde-haired young women and then leaves his calling card bearing a large letter A. Meanwhile, a strange young man takes a room with Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, whose daughter, Daisy, is the girlfriend of Joe, the policeman investigating the murders. The lodger's strange behaviour and his growing friendship with Daisy arouse the suspicions of the parents and eventually the policeman until they are convinced that he is *The Avenger*. On being challenged, the lodger (he is given no other soubriquet) escapes onto the foggy London streets, where he is chased by a mob

thirsting for the blood of the killer. It is only at the last moment that Joe learns that the real *Avenger* has been arrested and he is able to save the innocent man from the clutches of the mob. A simple enough tale, but, as with many of Hitchcock's films, the skill, chills, and beauty are in the telling.

This Hitchcock picture features for the first time the theme of a man who, wrongly accused of a crime, is forced to flee from those in pursuit. It reappeared in many later movies, notably *THE 39 STEPS* (1935), *YOUNG AND INNOCENT* (1937), *SABOTEUR* (1942), *SPELLBOUND* (1945), *NORTH BY NORTHWEST* (1959), and *FRENZY* (1972). There is a well-documented story concerning the young Alfred, who, as a child, was sent to the police station by his father bearing a note after the boy had committed some trivial misdemeanor. In the note, Hitchcock's father asked for his son to be locked in a cell for a short time "to teach him a lesson." The memory of this cruel and heartless act stayed with Hitchcock all his life. One can imagine the bewilderment and fear the youngster must have felt as the policeman turned the key and left him alone in the dreary, cold cell. He must have wondered in his misery and panic what he had done to deserve this. Hitchcock later translated this frightening experience into the theme of the persecuted innocent.

At the end of *THE LODGER*, we learn that the suspected man (played by matinee idol Ivor Novello) is indeed innocent and that his strange behaviour was the result of his plans to revenge his sister's murder at the hands of *The Avenger*. The police, represented by the peevish and jealous Joe (Malcolm Keen), are shown not only to be fallible and short sighted but also vindictive. Hitchcock's memory of his brief incarceration seems to have led him to present the real officials of law and order as a threat to the hero or heroine in his films. In *BLACKMAIL* (1929), Hitchcock's first talkie, the heroine's boyfriend is converted from a lover into a dangerous threat to her freedom after she has killed a man in self-defence. It seems to be the case that one must never trust a policeman in a Hitchcock movie.

THE LODGER is wonderfully atmospheric. London is presented as a claustrophobic and fog-bound environment. There is neither daylight nor brightly lit shots to lighten the increasing gloom of the story. Hitchcock had recently re-



turned from Germany (where he had been working on *THE PLEASURE GARDEN*/1926) and had been impressed by the expressionist cinema there, particularly of the work of Fritz Lang and F. W. Murnau. Their influence can be noted in his use of shadows and oblique angles.

The picture opens with a shock. We see the face of a young blonde girl screaming in terror, screaming for her life. It is an effectively disquieting start to the movie. There is no buildup to it. The credits fade and the screaming face appears. Somehow it is more awful because of the silence. We cannot hear the scream, only imagine its intensity. The girl is *The Avenger's* seventh victim.

Hitchcock quickly establishes the great public interest—and fear—in *The Avenger's* crimes. He shows a crowd pressing around the dead body as the police try to hold them back. There follows a sequence in which we see the reporters phoning in their story to the papers, how the papers are printed, distributed, and then bought and read avidly. Hitchcock also shows how *The Avenger's* crimes are broadcast on the radio (crude crystal sets in those days) and, in a chilling montage, we see closeups, filling the screen, of a series of faces listening on headphones to the details of the latest slaying. We cannot know the exact words they are hearing, but their faces, registering horror, disgust, fear, and despair, tell their own story.

Despite the revelation at the end of the film that the lodger is innocent, Hitchcock was determined to present him as an ambiguous figure so that we, the audience, like Daisy's parents, begin to believe that he is in fact the murderer. When he takes his room in the Jackson household, he initially turns all the portraits featuring the blonde-haired woman to the wall. He constantly behaves in a suspicious manner—a manner that gives

Ivor Novello—like Noel Coward, a stage star, a playwright, a songwriter, and gay—was the mysterious outsider in Alfred Hitchcock's *THE LODGER* (1926).



something to one of the most famous shots in the movie. The Jacksons hear their boarder, ensconced in a room above them, pacing up and down as though he is shouldering all the worries of the world. They look up at the ceiling, which gradually becomes transparent, allowing us to observe the troubled man pacing the room. Seen today, 74 years after it was filmed, it is still a remarkable shot, achieved by Hitchcock filming through a sheet of plate glass, which acts as the floor.

The Lodger's suspicious ways continue. When Daisy (played by an actress who is simply billed as June) drops some butter on her dress, he picks up a knife in a most threatening manner and then deftly scrapes the butter off without leaving a mark. When he plays chess with Daisy on an occasion when, as the caption informs us, "the lodger made himself agreeable," and she makes a smart move, he leans forward, grinning, but in rather a chilling way, and says, "Be careful, I'll get you yet." He also observes that Daisy has "beautiful golden hair." Look out, girl!

Hitchcock hoped to maintain the lodger's ambiguity to the end, allowing him to disappear into the fog, leaving the audience still in some doubt as to whether he was or was not The Avenger. But the studio would not allow him to pursue



THE LODGER arrives!

this idea. They thought that it was inappropriate that their star, the matinee idol Novello, should be thought of as a murdering villain. No, they said, there should be no doubt. He must be fully exonerated. Hitchcock played around with the same kind of ambiguity with Cary Grant's character in his 1942 feature

SUSPICION and again the original ending, which had Grant revealed as a murderer, was changed in order to present a happy, sanitized finale. Hitchcock was foiled again.

The climax of THE LODGER comes after the eighth victim is discovered. She was murdered the night the lodger went out in the early hours with his strange doctor's bag. Not only are Daisy's parents totally convinced that he is The Avenger, but so is Joe the policeman, although his actions are governed more by jealousy than reason. He arrives with his men and a search warrant. They find the lodger's bag in a locked cupboard. It contains incriminating evidence: a gun, a map noting the locations of the murders, and a photograph of a pretty blonde-haired girl. "My murdered sister," the lodger protests, but as always the policeman is so determined to make an arrest that he fails to consider the possibility of this claim being the truth. Daisy, however, is sure that "He's innocent." This outburst strengthens Joe's resolve to arrest the lodger and he claps handcuffs on him. Daisy cleverly gets in the way and the lodger manages to escape into the night, but still wearing the cuffs. Soon, however, he is being chased by a mob out for his blood. Attempting to climb

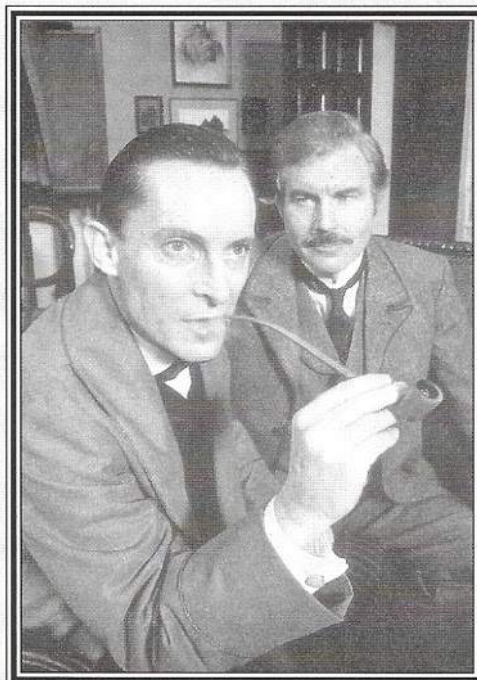
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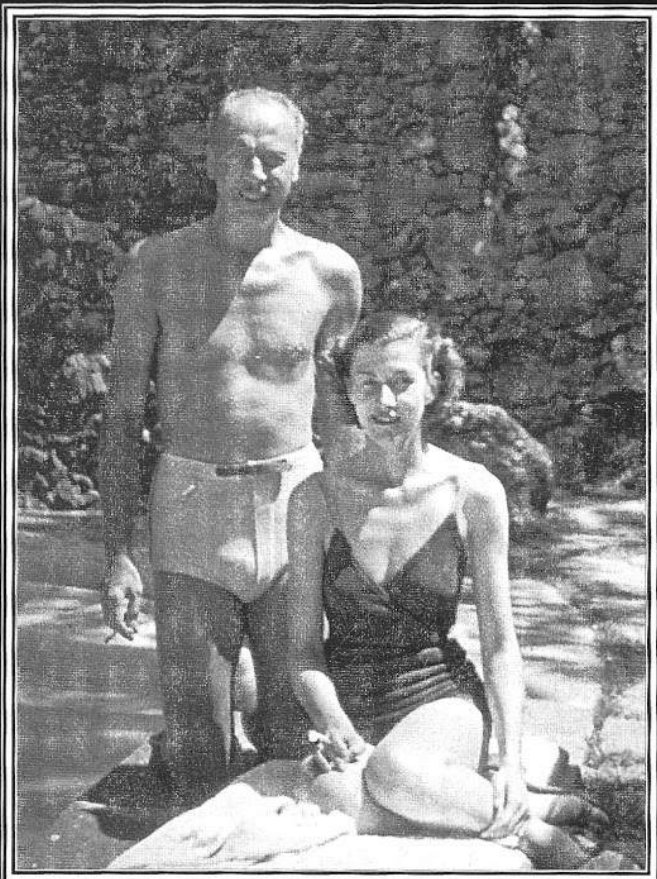
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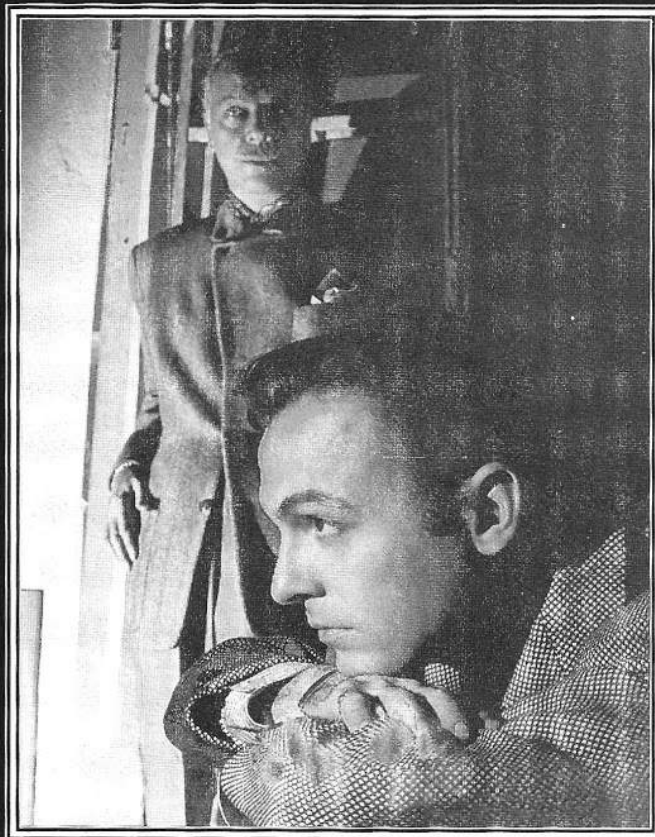
SEX

TAKE A HOLIDAY

by David Chierichetti

A wife, a gaggle of girlfriends, a bevy of boyfriends—it's a miracle that Mitchell Leisen, the man who made *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*, had time for a career!

The recent release of Universal's *MEET JOE BLACK* has sent many people to video stores in search of the earlier (and to my mind, better) take on the same tale, Mitchell Leisen's *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* (1933). (Universal also made a TV movie version of the tale, under the same title, with Monte Markham, Melvyn Douglas, Myrna Loy, and Yvette Mimieux in the early seventies.) After my book, *Mitchell Leisen Hollywood Director* (Curtis Books, 1973, reprinted by Photoventures Press in 1995), was published in a Spanish translation in 1997, I went to speak at the Filmoteca in Madrid before and after a screening of *DEATH* and got a chance to see it again in a beautiful new 35mm print. I am pleased that *Scarlet Street* has asked to reprint that chapter from my book and hereby contribute a few notes about Leisen's life and career in general.



Paramount pictures of the thirties and forties have been far less available on TV in the last two decades than those of MGM, Warner Bros., and RKO, and only certain ones of Leisen's have been made their way onto American Movie Classics. Despite the great commercial and critical success of Leisen's films in their era, judging from what I read about Leisen and the mail I get, he is best remembered these days for being the most blatant homosexual in the movie industry in the forties. Certainly this is true; for while other gay directors such as George Cukor and Edmund Goulding were discreet about their personal lives, Leisen had a most in-your-face attitude about his relationships with dancer Billy Daniels and others. He got away with this behavior only because his films consistently made huge profits and important stars clamored to work with him. By the late forties, however, box office receipts were down throughout the industry due to the coming of television, Paramount had cut down on production costs, and coincidentally Leisen's health and personal life (which was far more complex than most people knew) was making him so miserable that the hits stopped coming and his career in films ended abruptly.

He was born in Menominee, Michigan, on October 6, 1898, but grew up in St. Louis. At five, he was operated on for a club foot and grew up as an introverted child. Coming to Hollywood in 1919, he got into films as one of the costume designers on Cecil B. DeMille's *MALE AND FEMALE* (1919) and soon became an art director. (He had studied architecture.) By the coming of talking pictures, he had become DeMille's all-around assistant, climaxing with *THE SIGN OF THE CROSS* (1932), on which he designed the sets and costumes and DeMille let him stage some scenes without dialogue in order to speed up production.

Paramount chief Emanuel Cohen was aware of Leisen's wide-ranging talents and, when DeMille didn't need him for awhile, Cohen assigned Leisen to assist Stuart Walker on *TONIGHT IS OURS* (1932). Walker was a well-respected stage director who had run a famous stock company in the East, but his lack of movie background had seriously hampered his first film. Leisen claimed that the leads, Claudette Colbert and Fredric March, were his old pals from *THE SIGN OF THE CROSS* and "were accepting all my directions and paying no attention to Mr. Walker at all." When Paramount teamed Walker and Leisen again on *THE EAGLE AND THE HAWK* in 1933, the same thing happened. Leisen expected to get full credit for directing that one (Fredric March told me, "Mitch is 100 percent right in saying he directed *TONIGHT IS OURS* and *THE EAGLE AND THE HAWK*") and this time Paramount was willing, but Walker's contract forced the studio to give the credit to him. Leisen later told me, "The studio was just as furious as I was. Now I happened to know that Stuart had set his heart on directing both *CRADLE SONG* and *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*. I didn't know anything about

CRADLE SONG, but when the studio asked me what I wanted to do next, I said *CRADLE SONG*, then *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*, just to get back at Stuart. Those turned out to be two of my favorite pictures, so at least Mr. Walker had good taste."

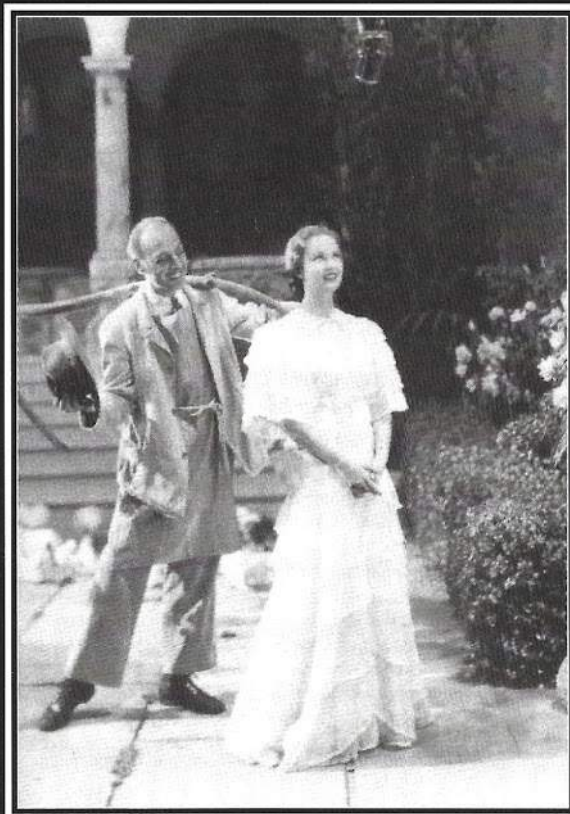
CRADLE SONG (1933) turned out to be a critical success and did well enough commercially to guarantee Leisen a good budget for *DEATH*. When the latter was released to smash business, Leisen's future at Paramount was assured. (In the same period, Cohen successfully promoted both Henry Hathaway and Alexander Hall into directing.)

In the next 15 years, Leisen directed a wide variety of films, including *MURDER AT THE VANITIES* (1934), *HANDS ACROSS THE TABLE* (1935), *EASY LIVING* (1937), *MIDNIGHT* (1939), *REMEMBER THE NIGHT* (1940), *ARISE MY LOVE* (1940), *HOLD BACK THE DAWN* (1941), *LADY IN THE DARK* (1944), *FRENCHMAN'S CREEK* (1944), and *KITTY* (1946). None of them lost money and most made a lot. In the early stage in his career, he was anxious to prove that his lack of stage experience did not hinder his work with actors. While he always paid much attention to the camera work, he was careful to delegate the costume designing to Travis Banton and Edith Head and the art direction to such talents as Wiard Ihnen and Hans Drier.

Leisen's personal life was equally varied. Through the twenties, he had carried on an affair with the actress Marguerite de la Motte, who was Douglas Fairbanks' leading lady in *THE THREE MUSKETEERS* (1921). Rather unexpectedly, however, he married Stella Yeager in 1927. Most people assumed that it was a marriage of convenience, since Stella would spend much of the next decade in Paris, studying singing. Ray

Milland told me Stella was a "terror," but Leisen never had anything unkind to say about her. I came to realize that he still loved her and mourned for her. Soon he was also involved in a romance with Natalie Visart (pictured, page 28), a friend of Cecil B. DeMille's daughter Katherine. This affair continued off and on for the next 20 years, climaxing in a few scary months in 1944 when Natalie got pregnant. After she miscarried, Natalie determined to leave Mitchell, and soon married writer Dwight Taylor, by whom she had two children. When Leisen was dying, however, Natalie left her husband and came back to care for Mitchell.

While all this was going on, Leisen was also involved discreetly in romances with men. Through the twenties, he managed to keep these affairs secret, though DeMille probably would have tolerated them if he had known. The one he loved the most and lived with was a pilot named Eddie Anderson, who had taught him to fly. He got Anderson a job as an extra on *THE SIGN OF THE CROSS*, held a birthday party for him on the set of *CRADLE SONG*, and eventually made him his assistant director on *THE BIG BROADCAST OF 1938*. Natalie Visart thought she knew what was really going on, but she tolerated and indeed even liked



A gaily-bedecked Mitchell Leisen on the set of *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* (1934) with star Evelyn Venable, who wrote under this photo in her scrapbook: "Mitchell Leisen 'auditioning' with Evelyn Venable." Leisen appears as a gardener to tell the heroine that a rose bush has bloomed overnight.



LEFT: Bob Hope and Shirley Ross sang "Thanks for the Memory" in *THE BIG BROADCAST OF 1938* (1938), but it was director Mitchell Leisen who was left with nothing but memories when his lover, Eddie Anderson, took up with Ross. **RIGHT:** Preston Sturges wrote the script and Leisen directed Edward Arnold, Jean Arthur, and Ray Milland in one of the great classics of screwball comedy: *EASY LIVING* (1937)

Anderson. The fact that they were both pilots and later colleagues at work made the fact that they shared the same house seem quite acceptable. Unfortunately for Mitchell, during the shooting of *THE BIG BROADCAST OF 1938*, Anderson fell in love with the leading lady, Shirley Ross. Leisen was heartbroken when Anderson began running to Ross' dressing room at the end of the day instead of going to the mandatory production meeting. The night the shooting ended, Leisen went home and suffered a heart attack and a nervous breakdown. (For the record, Natalie always told me that this collapse was due to W.C. Fields' horrible behavior during the shoot. However, the second assistant director, Chico Day, more recently told me that Anderson was really the straw that broke the camel's back.)

After six months of rest, Leisen came back to the studio. On the surface, he was his usual dapper self. (Marsha Hunt, who played a small part in *EASY LIVING*, told me that in life Leisen was just like the elegant man William Powell played on the screen.) However, those closest to him could see that he had greatly changed. Although most of his most famous pictures were yet to come, the comfort he got from work was beginning to ebb. Billy Daniels, a boyfriend who appeared in Leisen's nightclub revues and had already been in a couple of films, soon became ubiquitous. Before long, Leisen had an enormous portrait of Daniels installed in his office, along with a lovingly inscribed photo

Continued on page 37

LEFT: Leisen had another great screenwriter in Billy Wilder, who, with Charles Brackett, wrote *MIDNIGHT* (1939) for Don Ameche, Claudette Colbert, and John Barrymore. **RIGHT:** Taking Eddie Anderson's place in Leisen's heart was dancer Billy Daniels (pictured with the director on page 28, who choreographed many Paramount films, including *ROAD TO RIO* (1947) with Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters.



DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY

by David Chierichetti

Mitchell Leisen's sense of visual imagery was used to great advantage in his fourth film, *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* (1934). Tackling subject matter that was more profound than in his previous films, Leisen created a film that was superb in all departments and an enormous commercial success.

The raw materials Leisen had to work with on *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* were all first rate. Maxwell Anderson participated in the adaptation of his own successful Broadway play (derived in turn from a Spanish work by Alberto Cassello) and the cast headed by Fredric March, Evelyn Venable, and Sir Guy Standing, was very well chosen. Although he had a moderate budget of \$317,000 and a fast schedule of 27 days, Leisen was greatly aided in the execution of his visual concepts by the masterful cinematography of Charles Lang and the art direction of the very talented Ernst Fegte. The pictorial quality retained the lyrical aura of *CRADLE SONG* (1933); infused here with a strong feeling of fantasy, it had a too-beautiful-to-be-real effect.

The film opens with a familiar device of the early thirties, which was already fading from use by 1934. After the credits, we see a closeup of Sir Guy Standing holding an armful of chrysanthemums. White lettering at the bottom of the frame identifies, "Sir Guy Standing as Duke Lambert." Leisen pans over to Helen Westley as Standing passes her the heaps of mums. She is introduced in the same manner, as is the rest of the cast. Then the camera moves to a church where Evelyn Venable as Grazia, kneels in prayer. Gazing dreamily at her fiance, Corrado (Kent Taylor), she says, "I hoped I would be finished before you missed me," indicating that Grazia doesn't seem to control her own destiny. She is the only one of the party who is not frightened by an inexplicable black shadow which pursues the cars as they drive back to their palazzo. For their entrance into the palazzo, Leisen had Charles Lang pull farther and farther back in one of the most elaborate crane shots ever devised. Lang picked the group up at the door, and always preceding it at the same distance, followed it down an enormous corridor lined with the tombs of dead ancestors for several minutes, finally turning a corridor as the group enters the magnificent salon.

Grazia strolls out into the garden, where an indescribable sensation passes over her and she faints. She is carried into the house and revived, but she cannot explain what happened. "... an icy wind seemed to touch me, only it wasn't a wind," she says.

The guests retire, and as he is putting out the lights, the Duke is suddenly confronted with a black apparition. He fires his pistol at it, but to no effect. The apparition speaks and reveals that it is Death, come to Earth to seek the reasons that cause men to fear Death so, and to find what joys of living are so profound as to cause a desire to prolong life. Death decides to take human form, assuming the identity of Prince Sirki, a house guest the Duke had awaited.

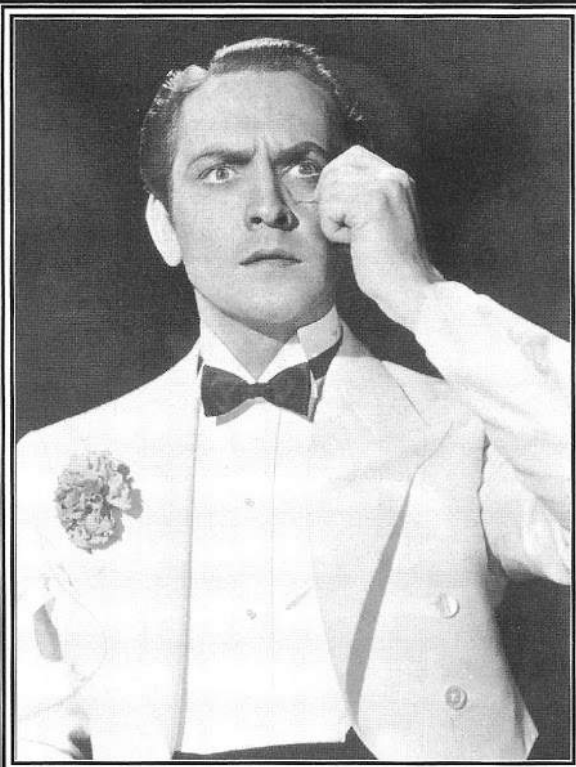
No person, animal, or plant dies during the next three days, during which Death enjoys all earthly pleasures. He is pursued by two beautiful women (Gail Patrick and Katherine Alexander) and wins constantly at the races and in the casino. He fails, however, to find any quality of human life as profound as death.

In the evening of his third and final day, the Duke gives a big party. Both ladies are at their most seductive, but they run in terror when they perceive something of Prince Sirki's true nature. Grazia is not afraid of her love for Sirki. They disappear together into the garden where their love is consummated.

They return and console Grazia's terrified mother and friends. As the clock strikes midnight, Death relinquishes human form and is once again the black apparition. He says, "Now you see me as I really am." Grazia replies, "I have always seen you that way. I love you." "Now I know that love is stronger than death," is Death's final word, as Grazia walks up the stairs to him. They disappear and a breeze scatters newly fallen leaves across the stairs. Death's holiday is over.

Beyond its great beauty, *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* is a profound philosophical statement. Surprisingly, perhaps, the concept of death is completely existential. Although Grazia is apparently very religious, no mention is made of heaven as the hereafter. Death is viewed simply as a cessation of life. While there are some vague references to an eternal life, they are not necessarily indicative of Christian beliefs.

Fredric March is perfectly cast in the title role. His masterful presence and commanding voice give just the right feeling of all-knowing wisdom to Death's speeches, and March's histrionic technique of overplaying some scenes is just right for the larger-than-life aura of the inhuman Prince Sirki. The role of Grazia, who neither understands nor attempts to suppress her subconscious wish to die, is as pivotal and basically unplayable as Death, but Evelyn Venable matches March's virtuosity. Lines that are spooky and incredible on paper become reality when Miss Venable



Fredric March as Prince Sirki



The lovely Grazia (Evelyn Venable) meets a mysterious figure shrouded in black (Fredric March) in *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* (1934). The transparent effect used for Death was accomplished without resorting to camera trickery.

speaks them. Grazia knows intuitively but cannot verbalize all the answers of eternity which her friends fear to discover. She is indifferent to pleasure and seems to absorb few of the realities of life. Her only reality is that which she shares with Sirki, a reality that can be only speculation to the others.

Sir Guy Standing, Kent Taylor, Kathleen Howard, and all the others contribute fine acting in the other roles. The beauty of the cinematography and art direction notwithstanding, it is the actors' performances of Maxwell Anderson's extraordinary script that makes *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* great. Working for the first time without any codirector or dialogue coach, Leisen proved that his skill in directing actors was just as strong as his visual orientation. *DEATH* was Leisen's first big commercial success, and thereafter his position at Paramount was secure.

Mitchell Leisen: Evelyn Venable had a very charming quality to her voice; it was a very rich voice. Grazia is a hard role to play, and indeed to write. Maxwell Anderson and I had quite an argument over this. He said Grazia had no motivation. I said that Grazia had every motivation; having just done eight years of psychiatry, I was full of "motivation." Her motivation is simply that she does not want to live. She wants peace and quiet, which is symbolized to her by death. I said to Max, "Just take the attitude that this girl has gone out into the garden at night, gotten pneumonia, and doesn't have the will to live." In the introduction, I showed the whole cast at a wine festival, loud and raucous and everybody having a ball. Then we find Grazia in the church, with the choir singing. I wanted to plant, from the very beginning, the character of this girl who only wanted peace and quiet.

I cast Kent Taylor as her fiancé because he resembled Freddy March so much. They looked almost exactly the same, and I wanted to get the effect over that March represented Death, and Taylor was Life. She loved them both, but she loved Death more.

There was quite a cast in there. The mother was Kathleen Howard, from the Metropolitan Opera Company. There's a very amusing story about her. I was entertaining the Maharajah and Maharanee of Indor one night; my wife was in Paris at the time, so I asked Kathleen to be the hostess. They arrived and I said, "Your highnesses, may I present . . ." and I went completely blank. I looked at Kathleen and I said, "What's your name?" She could have killed me!

The effect of Death being transparent was very difficult to do because we wanted to do it right in the camera instead of having the lab put it in, and we had to keep him within two or three feet of Sir Guy Standing, who had to remain solid. We duplicated certain pieces of the set in black velvet. Then we put a mirror in front of Freddy that was only 30 percent silvered so that you could shoot through it. In order to make him transparent, we simply lit up certain portions of the black set which reflected in the mirror superimposed over Freddy, giving the appearance that he was transparent. Shooting through the mirror had a tendency to make a slightly soft focus, but soft focus was considered very artistic at the time.

The costume was many layers of chiffon from charcoal grey to black. His face was made up like a skull and there were tiny lights under the hood to light up the face. The shadows hovering over the cars were printed in by the Special Effects Department. The only place we could

Continued on page 35

MEET JOE BLACK

by Richard Valley

MEET JOE BLACK (1998) is much like a genre film from the Golden Age of Hollywood, the 1930s—except that it doesn't quite know which genre to claim as its own. Fantasy? Well, yes, definitely; the story does after all concern Death taking human form to walk among mere mortals. Horror? Perhaps just a soupcon, in the Grim Reaper's disembodied voice and barely-glimpsed figure before he's revealed to be Hollywood superhunk Brad Pitt. Drama? There's the dilemma of William Parrish (Sir Anthony Hopkins), doomed to die but anxious to see that his life's work falls into the right hands. Romance? Susan Parrish (Claire Forlani) thinks Joe Black (Pitt) is to die for—which she might very well wind up doing. Musical? There's a string of classic Porter, Gershwin, Kern, Rodgers, and Berlin tunes at the film's climactic birthday bash, and a dance with Death for Susan. Screwball comedy? There's peanut butter . . .

Peanut butter? (Try saying it with as much astonishment as Bette Davis musters saying "Mustard!" in 1941's *THE BRIDE CAME COD*.) Yes, peanut butter! This latest filmic incarnation of the ultimate Man in Black, it seems, has never heard of peanut butter, not Skippy's, not Jiff's, not Peter Pan's. He's walked the Earth since the dawn of time itself, he's interrupted countless human beings in the act of doing countless things, from driving to having sex to having sex while driving, and gently escorted them to the Stygian shores—but nope, the poor dope's never heard of peanut butter.

Is it any wonder Death feels compelled to take human form to find out why people cling so desperately to life? Who would ever have guessed that they're doing it for the cholesterol!

Introduced to peanut butter (brand name unspecified), Joe Black reacts to it in much the same way Cary Grant reacts when he discovers he's dead in *TOPPER* (1938), the way Cary Grant reacts to Irene Dunne's ersatz striptease in *THE AWFUL TRUTH* (also 1938), the way Cary Grant reacts to learning that his name is Bone in *BRINGING UP BABY* (that's right; 1938)—with a detached bemusement. But Brad Pitt is no Cary Grant, and producer/director Martin Brest isn't Leo McCarey or Howard Hawks. (He isn't even Norman Z. McLeod.) Pitt actually gives evidence that, under the proper guidance, he might manage the charm and sophistication brought by Grant to his comedy roles, but here the pacing is too slow, the reactions too deliberate, and the interpretation—Mr. Doom as fresh-faced innocent—too bizarre. It's as if Death has been confused with Baby New Year, but no one has had the good sense to dress Pitt in his birthday suit. With a running time of three hours

or thereabouts, the audience, like Cary in *BRING UP BABY*, should at least have been thrown a bone . . .

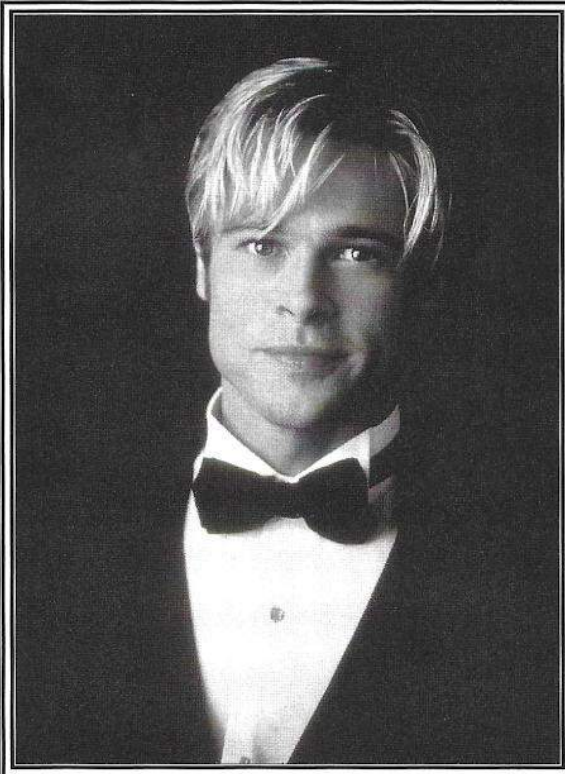
MEET JOE BLACK's screenplay, by Ron Osborn, Jeff Reno, Kevin Wade, and Bo Goldman, is based on the 1934 film *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*, adapted from Alberto Casella's play by Gladys Lehman, Walter Ferris, and famed thirties playwright Maxwell Anderson. As is often the case, they got it right (and better) the first time. The basic premise, Death's desire to learn why mankind fears him so, is the same, but the details are vastly altered. In *DEATH*, the elderly gentleman (Sir Guy Standing) who invites the sepulchral figure onto his estate is in no immediate danger

of bucket kicking. In *MEET JOE BLACK*, however, Parrish may perish at the drop of a hat. In *DEATH*, the Grim Reaper takes the form of Prince Sirki (Fredric March) and falls dead over heels for a beautiful young woman who already has one foot philosophically in the grave, the ethereal Grazia (Evelyn Venable). In *MEET JOE BLACK*, Death invades the body of a cheery, optimistic young man who meets Susan Parrish in a coffee shop, stops in the street to watch her departure, and is instantly knocked for an amazingly long loop by a series of speeding cars. And rather than wish for a peaceful oblivion, Susan is a dedicated doctor who fights death on a daily basis. (This is actually a promising idea, but virtually nothing is made of the potential for conflict.)

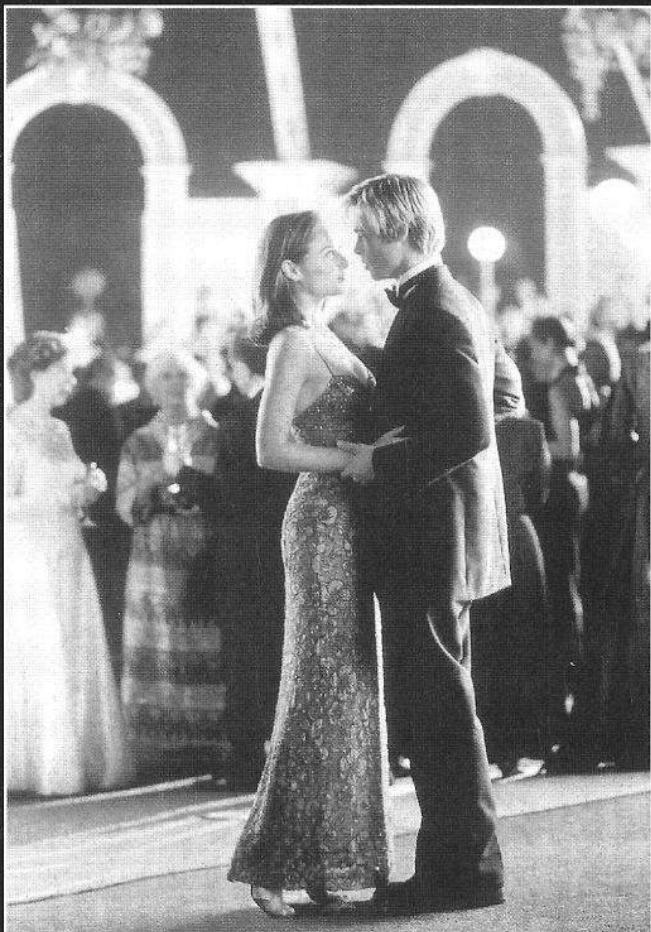
Perhaps most surprising in *MEET JOE BLACK* is the complete absence of the original's most fantastic and haunting premise (and the very meaning of its title): that, while Death takes his holiday, absolutely nothing on Earth expires. Wilted flowers and trees bloom. A man leaps from the

Eiffel Tower and survives, unhurt. Ships sink and not a soul drowns. An elderly Baron (Henry Travers), much given to grumbling before Sirki's arrival, finds himself with a new lease on life and an understanding that death isn't something to be feared.

On the other scythe, *MEET JOE BLACK* presents us with one measly multimillionaire whose death is forestalled till his house guest has had his fill of living, and an elderly Jamaican woman (Lois Kelly-Miller), a patient of Susan's, who recognizes Joe for what he is and asks him to speed her on her way to the promised land. Parroting her Jamaican accent (for no discernible reason other than that Pitt does it rather nicely), Joe at first begs off, but soon he happily obliges. In *MEET JOE BLACK*, it seems, *Death Takes a Working Holiday*. (And if that doesn't place the film, for all its thirties ambience, firmly in the last throws of the 20th century, then nothing does.)



Brad Pitt as Joe Black



LEFT: Susan Parrish (Claire Forlani) trips the light fantastic with Joe Black (Brad Pitt) at her father's birthday party, but the dance is more fantastic than she imagines—that's Death itself she holds in her arms. **RIGHT TOP:** William Parrish (Anthony Hopkins) makes a deal with the Grim Reaper, allowing him to learn about humanity as house guest Joe Black in exchange for a few extra days added to Parrish's life. **RIGHT BOTTOM:** Susan kisses Joe and learns to her horror that there's more to love than life!

The man responsible for bringing *DEATH* into the nineties is Martin Brest, producer/director of *SCENT OF A WOMAN* (1992), who spent a remarkable two decades on the project. "I first saw the original film over 20 years ago," said Brest, "and it intrigued me; haunted me, really. There was a suggestion in the old movie of what might be a great story, but it was a story that had yet to be discovered. We had to start from scratch because rather than do a remake I wanted to explore an element that sparked my interest."

When it comes to remakes—or non-remakes—Hollywood is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't. Remake *PSYCHO* (1960) scene for scene and you're slavishly imitating the Master of Suspense. Take an "element" from the original and run with it and you're trashing the original. *MEET JOE BLACK*'s problem is that Brest took his element and ran too far. Death's host becomes, in the words of Universal's publicity machine, "a wealthy, powerful, universally respected businessman and his family." In other words, *MEET JOE BLACK*'s fantasy figure turns out not to be Death at all, but William Parrish! And it's in the character of Parrish that *MEET JOE BLACK* fatally parts company with its thirties-era precursors and its Capra-esque celebrations of the People.

A wealthy businessman in a thirties entertainment almost always meant one thing: somewhere in the cast, usually billed third or fourth, you'd find Edward Arnold. He was forever overpowering, overbearing, overworked—and often crooked. As J. B. Ball in Mitchell Leisen's *EASY LIVING* (1937), he temporarily escaped from his madcap family through a chance meeting with Jean Arthur. As Anthony P. Kirby in Frank Capra's *YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU*

(1938), he learned how to relax and forget about business by playing "Turkey in the Straw" with Lionel Barrymore. And as Jim Taylor in Capra's *MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON* (1939), he learned never to underestimate the common man. So identified with big business was Edward Arnold that he even starred as one of the biggest businessmen of all time: Diamond Jim Brady in *DIAMOND JIM* (1935).

If Brad Pitt is no Cary Grant, then Anthony Hopkins is no Edward Arnold—not that he ever gets the chance. Even as Brady, Arnold was never the pure jewel that William "Bill" Parrish is in *MEET JOE BLACK*, and therein lies the failure of Martin's Brest's film to fully engage its audience. We are presented with two protagonists, neither one a common man—in fact, one not a man at all. The only common man anywhere in the film, truth to tell, is the human Ping Pong ball played by Pitt in the coffee shop scene, and he spends most of this almost endless movie possessed by a peanut butter fanatic from the Great Beyond. In fact, had Joe discovered some jelly to go with his peanut butter, the poor guy would probably still be dead.

DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY takes place in a foreign land and is peopled by characters with (by American standards) exotic names, but it has the common touch that is entirely lacking in *MEET JOE BLACK*. That the touch is the touch of death, and that death comes to all of us whether or not we wield great power and have offices the size of Grand Central Station, is not a concept that comes easily to the men of modern Hollywood.



DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY

Continued from page 32

find real Italian Cypress trees was out in Newhall, and they were only on one side of the road, so we had to always use the same angle.

The other women were very interesting. Gail Patrick was a healthy young American girl, who can't see Death at all. It never enters her head. Katherine Alexander is the neurotic woman who comes face to face with Death and is terrified. She climbs the wall screaming and yelling when he says, "Look deep into my eyes and tell me what you see." His face changes into a skull and she goes berserk. That was done with red makeup. Under red light, the makeup didn't show and he looked normal. Then by dissolving the red light out and bringing the green light in, the makeup slowly began to show until his face became a skull. Loving symbolism as I do, I played that scene in the long corridor, which has sarcophagi and statues of dead emperors. It is a background suggesting death.

The scene when they arrive back from the festival at the beginning of the picture and walk down the long hallway was one very long take. Charlie Lang is a fantastic cameraman, but he is probably the slowest cameraman in the world. I don't know how he's been getting along recently when we don't have the schedules we used to have, but he keeps working all the time. It took him seven hours to light that. There were 10 or 12 people in that scene, all moving forward, with the camera trucking ahead of them. All the lights had to be set for each position, each mark on the floor that they would hit at different times. Originally that same take swung right into the living room without a break; now it cuts to a different angle which I don't remember.

David Chierichetti: *The scene where Grazia has fainted and they're all clustered around her was very nicely composed.*

Mitchell Leisen: I just had to rehearse and rehearse to get them into a position where they're not blocking each other. They had to hit their mark and lean in just so far enough so as not to block the lights or get their face into a position that threw a shadow on somebody else's face. I was practically on a closeup of Grazia, yet you never have the feeling that there was a deliberate hole left there to see her. If I may brag a bit, it was kind of a tour de force to get so many people into such a close shot.

Several times they've asked me to do a stage play and I've refused because the direction of a play and the direction of a film are two completely different things. In a play, you're working out of a cone to a proscenium that's at

least 30 feet across. On the screen, it's just the reverse. You're working down to the point of the cone, to a proscenium arch the size of your lens, approximately two inches. As you get closer to your camera, the action becomes more mental and less physical. With a closeup, the actor only thinks. Subtle changes take place in the musculature of the face from the thoughts. If an actor had an expressive face, as Garbo did, it was quite wonderful. You could run a closeup of her for 20 minutes, and see all the changes taking place in her face and eyes. Carole Lombard had the same quality, and to some extent, so do most actors. The principal problem then is to get them to think what their characters would be thinking.

Charles Lang: Mitch had a tremendous feel for the cameras; I guess it was because of his experience as an art director. He always placed the cameras himself. I'd give him the finder and he'd tell me what angles he wanted. He liked a slightly high angle on the women, which I like, too. It plays up the eyes and obscures the chin and neck a bit.

Mitch knew how to get the most out of the sets. He always staged the action so that the actors were against an interesting background. He told me how he wanted the camera to move, and it was up to me to find a way of doing it.

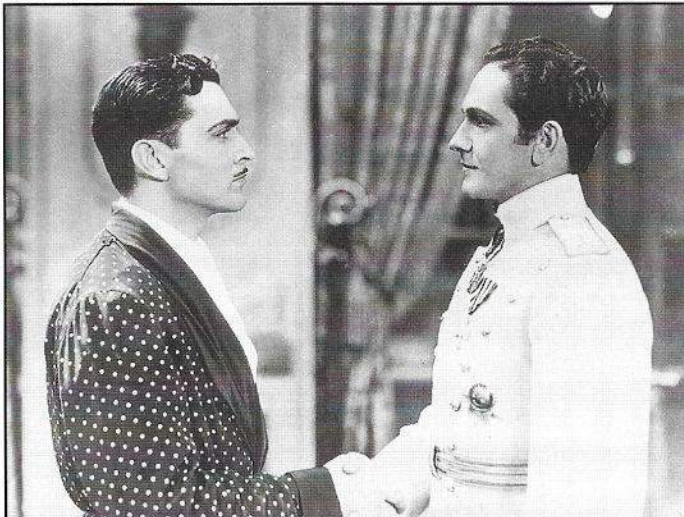
Mitchell Leisen: The front office gave me full control. Whatever I wanted, went. I remember Joe von Sternberg found out I was planning to have a collection of sarcophagi in the hall of the palazzo, and he went screaming bloody murder to the front office. He said I was stealing his thunder, that he was going to do the same thing in *SCARLET EMPRESS*. I never paid any attention to what he was doing and this was wholly coincidental. All I know is that I shot it that way and apparently he didn't.

David Chierichetti: *But weren't you both working with Hans Dreier, who might have suggested the same thing to both of you?*

Mitchell Leisen: Hans Dreier had nothing to do with *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*. He was the head of the art department and his name was in the credits of every Paramount picture, regardless. I worked directly with the unit art director Ernst Fegte, who is one of the most brilliant art directors of all times. Perhaps Hans supervised Ernst a little, but I know I had no contact with him at all.

I'd move heaven and earth to get Ernst Fegte on one of my pictures. I'd even postpone production until he was available. With other art directors, it was often difficult to get them to do anything themselves. They knew I had been

LEFT: Leisen chose Kent Taylor to play Evelyn Venable's human love interest because of his great resemblance to Fredric March. "They looked almost exactly alike," said Leisen, "and I wanted to get the effect over that March represented Death, and Taylor was Life. She loved them both, but she loved Death more." **RIGHT:** Prince Sirki's three love interests: Katherine Alexander, Evelyn Venable, and Gail Patrick. Patrick had been a strong contender to play the Panther Woman in *ISLAND OF LOST SOULS* (1933).



an art director, and they expected me to tell them exactly what I wanted. I had to tell them, "Look, this is your job, not mine. Make up some plans and then I'll go over it with you. It was even worse with wardrobe. I ended up doing some of the clothes on practically all of my pictures.

I would go up to the art department and see Ernst and his blueprints. Sometimes I sketched some detail on the back of an envelope or I said, "Make this room larger, we'll have a lot of people in this scene," but otherwise, I left it to him. He supervised all the construction. I looked in occasionally, but it was his job. He was on the set most of the time we were shooting the picture, so if something didn't work right or photograph right, he was there to correct it. Roland Anderson is another very talented art director, and so is Bill Ihnen, who is Edith Head's husband and was with us on *CRADLE SONG*. They could do it themselves without much assistance from me.

Ernst Fegte: To me, Mitch's career was like a star that got brighter and brighter until it exploded and the remnants fell to earth. I very rarely ever had to make a sketch for him. He's just about the only director I've ever known who could read blueprints. I'd have my draftsman make the plans up with all the elevations, and he could read them and visualize the whole thing. We thought so much alike, we must have had similar educational backgrounds. We were both fascinated by history and art and had to have everything absolutely authentic. He knew I would do everything pretty much the way he wanted, and while he was interested in my ideas, he never got very involved with the sets during preproduction. He was much more concerned about getting the script ready and he spent all his time working on that.

I first knew him when he was with us in the art department at Paramount. I admired his work on *SIGN OF THE CROSS* very much and from then on, I always paid attention to whatever he did. The whole department had to watch the dailies from every picture being shot on the lot, and I could tell that he had set up some of the scenes of *SIGN OF THE CROSS*. When we saw the dailies of *TONIGHT IS OURS* and *THE EAGLE AND THE HAWK*, I knew it had to be Mitch who was directing them, and not Stuart Walker, because it was all done with Mitch's flair for setting up action and moving the camera. I was very excited when I learned I was going to do *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* with Mitch.

The greatest art director Hollywood has ever had was Hans Dreier. He taught us that every picture must have something visual on the screen that the public will always remember, and we only have a few seconds of a long shot to do it. Sometimes we do it with architecture, sometimes with set dressing, sometimes just with colors. But you have to be a showman—Mitch is a showman and I am a showman. As head of the department, Hans had to make the assignments, and although he and Mitch never got along, he knew that the chemistry between Mitch and me was just right. Every so often in the heyday times, a group of compatible people got together on a picture and they were so sensitive and aware of each other's talents that it was wonderful. *FIVE GRAVES TO CAIRO* was like that for me, and

so was *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*. Mitch, myself, and Charlie Lang were an unbeatable combination.

Mitch is my pet kind of director. Some directors, like Fritz Lang, know exactly how they are going to shoot when they walk on the set. There are others like George Marshall, Victor Schertzinger, and David Butler, who shoot it any old way and don't pay much attention to the set. Then there are guys like Mitch who just have an infallible instinct. When Mitch came on the set in the morning, he had no preconceived notion as to how he'd do that day's work. He'd have the whole crew leave the set, except for myself, the cameraman, and the actors. He blocked the actors and while they walked through the scene, he watched them through the viewfinder from all different angles. Then it would slowly evolve. "If she comes in from the left, then we'll have the mantle behind her in the two shot. Good." He decided what he wanted behind the closeups and then staged the master scene so it all matched. His pictures cut together perfectly.

Where did I get the ideas for the set? Some were pure imagination and some pure fact from research. The stone mantle was an exact copy of something I found in a book, but the hallway was pure imagination. Most of it was a combination of both.

Evelyn Venable: When I went down to wardrobe to have my gowns for *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* fitted, one of the ladies said, "I'll go get the slip you're to wear." I got very alarmed and said, "But I'm not supposed to appear in a slip in any scene of this picture!" She said, "Mr. Leisen told us to get you the most beautiful slip to wear even though it will always be under the dress and will never be seen in the picture. He wants you to feel just like a princess."

They brought it out and it was gorgeous, like something from a trousseau. It was cream colored silk with handmade lace and hand rolled hems. I couldn't believe anybody could go to so much trouble on a fine detail, but Mitch knew what he was doing. From that moment on, I knew just what Grazia felt. Travis Banton designed a beautiful gown of heavy blue gray silk for the final scenes. It was lovely, but I told him I wanted something ethereal in white lace with a silver thread to catch the light. He said "Fine" and did it.

Acting with Fredric March was a pleasure until we got to the love scene. We rehearsed and did a couple of takes and when Mitch said print it, I was expecting to get up from the couch. March kept making love to me, under the lights and with everybody watching! He touched my bosom. I was so shocked I hauled off and slugged him. He ran to his dressing room and I ran to mine and neither of us would come out. Mitch ran back and forth, trying to make peace. I said I wouldn't come out until he apologized and eventually Mitch got him over and he mumbled something. I said, "That doesn't sound like you really mean it." So he said it again and we went back to work.

After I had married Hal Mohr, he was photographing *ANTHONY ADVERSE* and I visited him one day on the set. I saw Olivia de Havilland, who I knew from the play of A



Fredric March and Evelyn Venable

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LEFT: Rumor had it that the maddening antics of W. C. Fields (pictured with Dorothy Lamour, Martha Raye, and Shirley Ross) brought on Mitchell Leisen's heart attack, but it was more likely the loss of his boyfriend to Ross that did it. **RIGHT:** Barbara Stanwyck takes over a dead woman's identity in *NO MAN OF HER OWN* (1950), based on Cornell Woolrich's *I Married a Dead Man*.

SEX TAKES A HOLIDAY

Continued from page 30

graph on the piano. After the first edition of my book (in which I quoted Visart's evaluation of Daniels' relationship with Leisen as "something like *OF HUMAN BONDAGE*") a number of people stepped forward to tell me that Daniels was really a nice guy and very talented. Certainly he must have been a good sport to have lived with Mitchell, putting up with his temper, the strange clothes Mitchell insisted on designing and giving to Billy's mother ("I could never wear that in my hometown," said the bewildered Mrs. Daniels), and the other boys.

Leisen had a yacht which he loved to sail on Sundays. Some thought part of the attraction was that he could have

his assignments beyond the three mile limit. Then again, he wasn't always that careful. Roddy McDowall told me that he had heard rumors in the forties that Leisen had been arrested, but that Paramount had managed to hush the situation up.

In any case, Billy Daniels choreographed many musical shorts for Paramount, did the dances for films such as *MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE* (1946), *WELCOME STRANGER* (1947), *ROAD TO RIO* (1947), and *SCARED STIFF* (1953), and appeared as an actor in some other films, most notably as Dorothy Lamour's dance partner in *MASQUERADE IN MEXICO* (1945) and Betty Grable's partner in *WABASH AVENUE* (1950).

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LEFT: After moving to television, Leisen directed episodes of *THRILLER* and *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*, including "People Are the Same All Over," starring Roddy McDowall and Susan Oliver. **RIGHT:** Dorothy Lamour and Billy Daniels dance in *MASQUERADE IN MEXICO* (1945), a musical remake of *MIDNIGHT*.



Hooked on Acting

An interview with

Sir Dan McKellen



by Tony
Earnshaw

From theatrical heavyweight to gay rights activist, Sir Ian McKellen has many faces. Now he's preparing for his latest role, that of film star. He speaks exclusively to Tony Earnshaw . . .

The last time I interviewed Ian McKellen, he was ruminating on his misfortune at missing an Oscar nomination, for his outlandish film version of *RICHARD III*, by a handful of votes. Yet, then, almost three years ago, he was neither bitter nor even faintly surprised. Now, three years and a brilliant new film performance later, he is on the verge of the international screen stardom which eluded him then, but which, after last year's *GODS AND MONSTERS*, will be his for the taking.

Gay icon, theatrical heavyweight and, now, movie star, McKellen's success has been a long time coming. For years he toiled in the hinterlands of theater while his contemporaries raced ahead. He had to watch Sir Anthony Hopkins win an Oscar, for *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* (1991), and go on to take Hollywood by storm. While the scripts flooded in to the Welshman's agent, McKellen was still slogging away on the boards.

All that is about to change. McKellen's performance as openly-gay film director James Whale in *GODS AND MONSTERS* has already garnered him a nomination as best actor in the Golden Globes, and an Oscar nomination as well. It may yet grab him an Academy Award. Quite simply, it is the best thing he has ever done on celluloid. He knows it, too.

When we meet again, McKellen is leading a repertory company of actors at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, in Leeds, West Yorkshire, England. For him, it's a way of revisiting his roots in the sort of provincial rep companies in which he made his reputation 30 years ago. Over the course of six months, he is playing in Chekov's *THE SEAGULL*, as Dr. Dorn, in Coward's *PRESENT LAUGHTER*, as Garry Essendine, and as Prospero in *THE TEMPEST*.

He is far away from Hollywood when the Golden Globe nominations are announced, and when *GODS AND MONSTERS* takes the New York Film Awards by storm. So committed is he to the Playhouse that he turns down an astounding offer from the studio: they will buy an entire performance-worth of tickets if he will fly to the States to promote the movie . . .

"If you say you are going to be under contract for seven months [as I am in Leeds], then it means you can't do anything else. They don't quite understand that in Hollywood. They ask, 'Why can't you come over? Why can't we get you out of that ridiculous contract? Why can't you come over for the opening? They offered to buy out the house tickets for a night, but I told them no. The people of Yorkshire had bought tickets, they don't want their money back, they want to see the show. You have to stick to your guns,' he said with a touch of asperity.

McKellen's decision not to jet out to the States was indicative of the man. Five years ago, he decided to concentrate on movies in the knowledge he was about to take on the film version of his West End hit *RICHARD III*. He did just that, popping up in everything from *THE BALLAD OF LITTLE JO* (1993) and *SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION* (1993) to *THE SHADOW* (1994) and even Schwarzenegger's *LAST ACTION HERO* (1993), as a positively Bergmanesque, deadpan Grim Reaper, replete with cowl, scythe, and deathly pallor.

Now there is *GODS AND MONSTERS*, with McKellen as James Whale, the Hollywood giant behind *FRANKENSTEIN* (1931), *THE INVISIBLE MAN* (1933) *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935), *SHOW BOAT* (1936), *THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK* (1939), and *GREEN HELL* (1940).

In actuality, McKellen's pedigree as a film actor stretches back to the sixties, and pictures such as *ALFRED THE GREAT* (1969). He returned to the screen as tortured novelist D.H. Lawrence in *PRIEST OF LOVE* in 1981, and



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PREVIOUS PAGE: Ian McKellen as Captain Hook in the 1997 Royal National Theatre production of *PETER PAN*. Daniel Evans played the title role. **TOP:** McKellen starred as *RICHARD III* in 1995, in a resetting of Shakespeare's play to England in the thirties. **MIDDLE:** McKellen as the death camp Nazi Kurt Dussander in *APT PUPIL* (1998). **BOTTOM:** McKellen delighted classic horror fans with his touching portrayal of James Whale in *GODS AND MONSTERS* (1998).



LEFT: Ian McKellen played Uncle Freddie (opposite Clive Owen as Max) in the 1997 film version of the acclaimed play, *BENT*, which dramatized the treatment of homosexuals in Nazi Germany. **RIGHT:** A rather mod McKellen read prose and poetry on Radio 3's *WORDS, WORDS, WORDS* in the mid-seventies.

made regular appearances throughout the eighties until his revelatory performance as the fascist crookback in *RICHARD III* (1995). I mention his scattered filmography, and ask, as one of Britain's premier stage actors, whether he has been snobby about films. He looks quizzical before laughing quietly.

"My filmography . . . ? I've made various attempts which are not catalogued at trying to get parts in movies in which I've not succeeded. I've also turned down film parts which I would have liked to have done, but which I couldn't do because I was under a long term contract at the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company.

"But I've always envied my peers. I've always envied Alan Bates, Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay, of late Tony Hopkins, Jeremy Irons, Derek Jacobi, who do the Shakespeare or the new play on stage and then off they go and make a movie or three. I've really envied that balance that they've achieved and hoped to have it for myself. It's always escaped from me.

"But snobbish? No. I don't envy somebody who works exclusively in the cinema because they have to do an awful lot of dross. Well, they don't have to, but they do. In the theater, you can do old plays if there aren't any new ones. In the cinema, you're stuck with whatever is on offer and it's not always worth your while. So snobbish to that extent, then yes."

I ponder on why film stardom has come so late to McKellen. He's 59 now, and *GODS AND MONSTERS* looks, at last, to be his breakthrough to that nest of vipers known as Hollywood. Why, for instance, did it happen to Anthony Hopkins, but not Ian McKellen?

"Well, he had 10 years in Hollywood. He emigrated, did nothing but films. He always wanted to be a film star. Says so himself. That was his ambition—to be in a big, money-making movie. I remember when he won the Oscar for *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, he was a man in ecstasy, not just for that event, but because it was confirmation that a lad from the valleys could do it. He'd had Richard Burton before him as an idol. My idol was Laurence Olivier, the man whose company Tony Hopkins walked out of! Then he came back to England, the career not really having taken off in Hollywood, and he had the chance, the success, the luck of being in a movie which really worked and in which he was superb, and it all took off from there.

"Of late, all those little parts I did were all preparation for *RICHARD III*. I took three years. I said 'I won't do any theater. I'll just familiarize myself with the camera, get used to it, treat it as a friend.' So that explains all those little parts. I'm not going to play little parts anymore if I

can avoid it because they're not fulfilling, but they fulfilled that purpose at that time.

"Look, I'm very cool about my relationship with the film industry, particularly now because it's been so welcoming to me. When Spielberg called up and said he thought *RICHARD III* was a masterpiece and would I like to come out and have a chat about doing his next movie, I wasn't going to say no. But I'm also going to say to myself, 'Well, that's a bit of luck.'"

The stupendous critical and public reaction to *RICHARD III* both in the UK and abroad led to a flood of offers for McKellen, just like Anthony Hopkins before him. He went straight into Bryan Singer's *APT PUPIL* (1998), playing a 78-year-old former Nazi, made *AMY FOSTER* for Beeban Kidron, did the screen version of *BENT* (1997), and won an Emmy for his performance as the doomed Tsar Nicholas II, opposite Alan Rickman, in TV's *RASPUTIN*.

Then came *GODS AND MONSTERS* and McKellen's nomination for an Academy Award for Best Actor for playing James Whale, making him only the second openly gay actor in Hollywood history, after Sir Nigel Hawthorne, to be so honored.

McKellen is reticent about the prospect of major Hollywood baubles. When the news broke about his Golden Globe nomination, he remained polite but tight-lipped. He seems almost immune to talk of Oscar glory, perhaps after he was pipped to the nomination last time, by a mere two votes, by Richard Dreyfuss for *MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS* (1995).

"I thought it was one vote, actually," he smiles. "If I had won, then, I would have thought, 'What a wonderful fluke. What an irony. The first time I ever got a really decent part and bingo! you hit the bull's-eye.' But that aside, what would it have meant to the movie, because that's what we think about. It would have meant, particularly in the States, credibility, a confirmation that it was a popular movie. We didn't break through as much as I wanted to do in America. An Oscar would have done that."

There is no such problem with *GODS AND MONSTERS*. America has already grasped the movie to its heart with hoops of steel. Nudging 60, with four decades of theater and film behind him, it will be the making of McKellen, and he knows it. He is also quick to grasp the parallels between himself and the man he plays. Whale was openly gay—an almost unheard of attitude in the Hollywood of the thirties and forties, when homosexual men (and women) were forced to hide their sexual preferences behind machismo and sham marriages.

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Not Just Another Flash in the Pan

by Bert Coules

We've all seen it: a middle-aged woman in tights slaps her thigh and struts round the stage waving a toy-like sword. Occasionally, she bursts into song before being hauled aloft on unpredictable and all-too-visible wires. Peter Pan! That lovable story about adventures and fun and magic. The ultimate fun-and-frolic Christmas pantomime.

And then there's the real thing . . .

Peter Pan—"that demon" his creator called him—came from the darkest and most disturbed depths of writer J. M. Barrie's psyche. Profoundly affected by the death of his older brother and even more scarred by his mother's reaction to the tragedy, the six-year-old James Matthew resolved to replace the lost David so completely that his grieving mother would not notice that he was gone. In one sense, he was eerily successful: David's fatal skiing accident happened the day before his 14th birthday; once he reached the same age, Barrie simply stopped growing, remaining at exactly five feet tall until the day he died. A further 10 years were to pass before he started shaving, and for the rest of his life he occupied an uneasy, unsettling place in what Barrie expert Andrew Birkin (*J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys*, 1979) once called "a no-man's land between childhood and maturity."

In his mid-sixties, Barrie recorded a sudden, searingly personal insight into his famous creation: "Long after writing Pan its true meaning comes to me: a desperate attempt to grow up—but can't . . ."

It was the desire to explore this dark side of Barrie's much-abused work that led the Royal Shakespeare Company to mount a new and radical production in 1982. John Caird and Trevor Nunn, two noted writer/directors more familiar in the world of *King Lear* than *Captain Hook*, reworked the play, incorporating elements from Barrie's own extended tinkering with the characters and their story: the novel, a silent-film treatment, and various acting editions of the text, both in the UK and abroad.

The end result was a script that contained nothing that Barrie himself didn't write, but which threw the more disturbing and thought-provoking aspects of the piece into much sharper relief than previous editions. Caird and Nunn particularly emphasized the complex central exploration of the mother/son relationship: "When ladies used to come to me in dreams, I said 'pretty mother!' but when one really came, I shot her!" cries one of the *Lost Boys*. It's one of many lines that perhaps strike a modern audience more forcibly than they did Barrie's contemporaries, who tended to see the piece as no more than a rather silly boys' adventure yarn—though actor Herbert Beerbohm Tree, on first reading the original 1904 playscript, may have perceived something rather deeper and more upsetting. He telegraphed to a friend: "Barrie has gone out of his mind."

Crucial to Caird and Nunn's approach was the casting of the central role. Peter was to be played—possibly for the first time anywhere—by a young man. Over the three years of the production's life, several actors took the part, all of them cast for what was described at the time as their "unsettling other-worldliness."

The result was hailed in some quarters as a revelation. The fun-packed pantomime had become a disturbing exploration of innocence and loss and death and desire, brilliantly wrapped up in a story that still managed to work at its most basic level as an exciting action-adventure.

In 1997, London's Royal National Theatre announced a revival of the Caird/Nunn *PETER PAN* as its main Christmas production. The original set designer, John Napier, rejoined the team to rework the show for the RNT's Olivier Theatre—a huge and versatile space with an open-plan stage and enormous ceiling height. As before, Peter would be played by a male actor—this time, Welshman Daniel Evans—and the rest of the cast would include Jenny Agutter as Mrs. Darling, Alec McCowen as The Storyteller (a J. M. Barrie-like narrator figure, an inspired addition of Caird and Nunn's), and Sir Ian McKellen traditionally doubling Mr. Darling and Captain Hook. I never saw the original RSC production and so I booked my seat at the Olivier in great expectation . . .

And I wasn't disappointed. It was a splendid show, and my particular performance was made even more memorable by events that I couldn't possibly have foreseen.

The usual practice at the National Theatre is to precede the official first night of a new production with a series of public previews. These serve as a shakedown period for the cast, the production team, and the technical crew, but they are not rehearsals: they're full-blown performances and treated as such by everyone on both sides of the footlights. My ticket was for the final preview of 10 or 12, so I reckoned I'd be seeing a *PETER PAN* pretty well honed and polished and ready to fly for the first-night critics.

So I was rather taken aback when a soberly-suited gentleman walked out onto the stage before the show started. He introduced himself as Sir Richard Eyre, Director of the theater, and explained that he had come to ask for our help: due to the enormous technical demands of the production, tonight's was actually the first preview—all the others had been canceled because the show wasn't ready for a public airing. And what's more, tonight was the first time they'd ever performed the piece all the way through without a break. Please would we bear with them if anything went wrong, and extend our indulgence at any minor—or major—mishaps.

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Breaking with theatrical tradition, Daniel Evans is one of the few male actors to have played the eternal boy, *PETER PAN*

Continued on next page

RIGHT: In July 1906, J. M. Barrie plays at being Captain Hook, with six-year-old Michael Llewelyn Davies as Peter Pan. Michael was one of the five Davies boys (the others were George, Jack, Peter, and Nicholas) who inspired Barrie's timeless fairy tale. Sadly, their lives were marred by tragedy. Their parents, Arthur and Sylvia, both died young, leaving the children in Barrie's care. George died at 22 in battle during the first world war, Michael drowned at 20 while at school (in a possible homosexual suicide with Rupert Buxton, a fellow undergraduate), and Peter, at 63, who had grown to resent his association with the famous story, threw himself beneath an oncoming train. **BELOW:** Thanks to the wonders of television and videotape, Mary Martin remains one of the most famous actresses ever to take the lead in *PETER PAN*.

FLASH IN THE PAN

Continued from page 41

Well, of course we would. There's nothing a British audience likes more than rooting for someone to succeed against the odds, and Sir Richard's speech had got us all guessing about just how unprepared things were—would Peter fail to take off? Would the crocodile have mislaid its tick? Would Hook's hook be disappointingly straight? Would the Lost Boys be truly lost, condemned to wander forever through the labyrinth of backstage corridors and underground storage areas?

As it turned out, none of these things happened, though plenty of others did—but not one of them did

anything to detract from the pleasures of the evening. It was one of those great occasions that can only happen at live events, when the audience and the performers are united, willing things to succeed.

When there was the occasional hitch, we waited with bated breath for things to be put back on track; and we rejoiced with the actors and the stage staff when a mishap was averted or a potential disaster neatly side-stepped. One of the biggest audience reactions of the night was given to a young stagehand who—watched by a colorful band of pirates and Red Indians—bravely walked out to the middle of the acting area in her black sweatshirt and jeans to tie a rope round the neck of the suddenly-immobile animatronic Crocodile and lead it tenderly offstage so the action could continue. It is a measure of the play, the per-



Photo: J. M. Barrie

formances, and the production that such incidents did nothing to dilute the essential power of the piece.

The huge cast of almost 40 actors were excellent, with standout showings by Daniel Evans, Ian McKellen, and Claudie Blakely as a Wendy some way removed from the usual simpering, helpless little thing. Here was a girl who knew what she wanted and how to get it, and who was perfectly prepared to kill a pirate or two if they happened to get in her way. Very occasionally, this produced results which would surely have displeased the traditionally male-orientated Barrie: at one point, with Pan in crisis and no boys around to come to the rescue, the line "Peter's in trouble and there's no one here who can help!" drew an indignant response from a small girl in my row: "Well, get Wendy!"

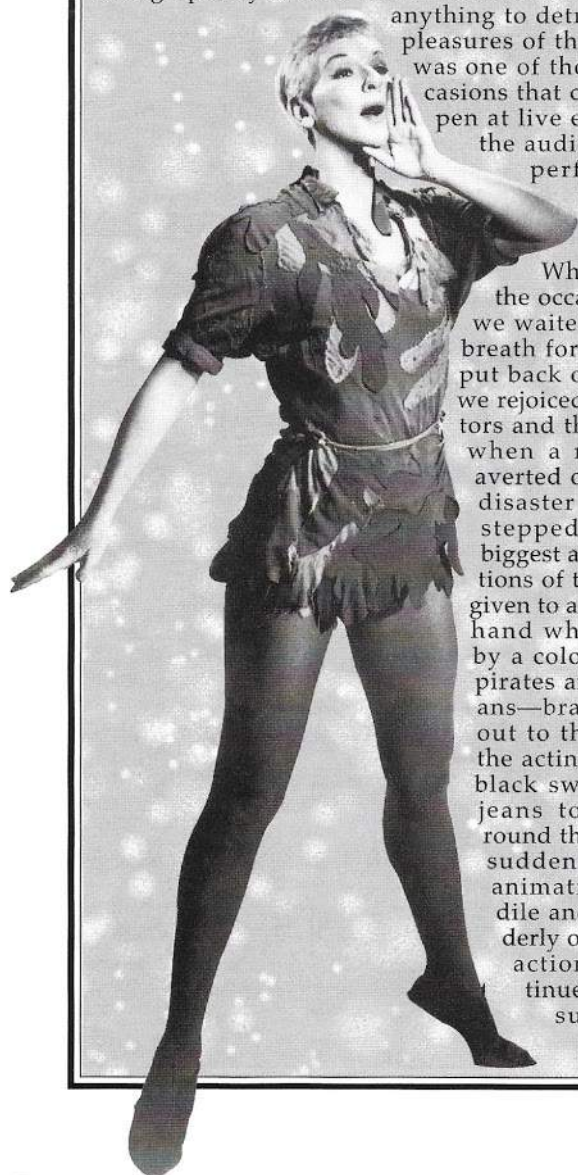
Those troublesome technical aspects of the show proved worth the wait. As a theatrical spectacle, this was second-to-none, with stunning visible scene-changes, some glorious lighting, and best of all, the finest flying I've seen in a theater this side of David Copperfield.

But what about this new approach? Did it work, this supposedly dark and disturbing look at the farthest recesses of J. M. Barrie's imagination? For me, and I think for the rest of the audience, too, yes, it did: it worked and it worked well, and there was a welcome seriousness and depth in the acting and the direction. Interestingly, the weakest aspects of the show were the most conservative ones, the moments when we could almost have been watching a 1920s ultra-traditional rendition. I got the impression that the production team would have liked to go even further than they did in purging the piece, but somehow felt obliged to leave in the odd song or over-the-top bit of slapstick—and to be fair, the huge number of children in the audience loved those sequences and took great, time-honored delight in booing the villains and cheering the heroes. But those same children were held, too, by the many quieter, more reflective moments, by Peter's musing about death and loss, by Wendy's longing for home and stability and safety, and by Hook's flawlessly logical but desperately sad realization that since no little children will ever love him, he has no option but to kill them.

Peter Pan was almost entirely sold out for the whole of its run, and its success has ensured that it will be revived next Christmas and probably several more to come. It's a splendid show and well worth going out of your way to see. You'll never be able to take that middle-aged lady in tights again . . .



Bert Coules and his work on the BBC Radio Sherlock Holmes series will be profiled in an upcoming issue.



SIR IAN McKELLEN
Continued from page 40

McKellen has no such enforced hang-ups. He publicly came out as a gay man 11 years ago during a BBC Radio 4 discussion about the Thatcher government's infamous Section 28 of the Local Government Act, making illegal the public "promotion of homosexuality." Overnight he became an active member of the movement to change those British laws which discriminate against lesbians and gay men. He is a cofounder of the gay pressure group Stonewall, which works for social and legal equality, and he annually directs THE EQUALITY SHOW, its principal source of funding at London's Royal Albert Hall.

"GODS AND MONSTERS is about the English film director, James Whale, who was born in the Midlands. In the twenties, he became an actor in London, but he dropped his accent and did lots of classical and modern acting. He started directing, did JOURNEY'S END in Hollywood, and stayed openly gay. In Hollywood, he directed the first two Frankenstein movies, THE INVISIBLE MAN, SHOW BOAT, and THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK. He was the highest-paid director of his time. He retired, came back here, and lived out his life painting and reading quite happily. He was found lying dead at the bottom of his swimming pool one day, and this fictionalized version explores the last few weeks of his life, and how that came about.

"You can see there are a number of connections with my life there. Most of his life he was an actor and knew what it was like to be a foreigner in Hollywood. It's just been on at the New York Film Festival, and it's been very highly praised. I realize that I am acting there without any disguises at all. My hair is dyed white, but it's me. My friends say, 'You've put more of yourself into this than any other part,' but most of the experience of doing a film or play doesn't begin or end with the part you're playing; it's very much who you're doing it with, whether it's successful or not and whether the audiences liked it than whether it's a strain doing it."

As one of the UK's biggest theatrical names, McKellen takes his role as a gay icon seriously. He channeled his clout as one of the country's few openly gay knights—he was knighted by the Queen in 1990—to lobby for changes in the British constitution, becoming one of the leading gay rights activists in the country. He was the first gay rights campaigner to hold a meeting with a British Prime Minister—John Major in 1991—at which he discussed three main issues: criminal law, which made a relationship between two men an offence if either was under 21 (it was reduced to 18 in 1994, and gay rights groups are campaigning to reduce it to 16 in line with the law for heterosexuals); general discrimination, and the attitude of the British Armed Forces towards homosexuals.

The same year he said: "The problem of being gay or lesbian is in other people's reaction. It's a constant puzzle to me how one can begin to dismantle the ignorance which breeds the prejudice which has informed the way society treats individuals."

McKellen is an extremely charismatic man. He is ebullient, witty, funny, and immense fun to be around. And that's the same whether you're of the same sexual persuasion or not. For the record, I'm not gay, but I did find McKellen attractive. Equally for the record, I don't know whether he found me attractive or not, and that's an important point to make. Not all homosexuals are predators. The vast majority are not pedophiles. Those images are just two among many which McKellen and others like him are attempting to batter down.

When asked at what time he knew he was gay, McKellen replies: "About the same time you knew you were straight." It's difficult to put a time on it, and McKellen agrees.

"Yes, it is hard to say. You see, I'm just the same as you. It's just that I don't want to sleep with women and you do. To this day, I find I love scenes between men and women not distasteful, but boring. I'm waiting for the action! As a child, that really used to worry me, because I could feel the heat rising in the cinema and I was getting cooler.

"I'm very attracted to women. I just don't happen to go that little step extra and actually sleep with them. The first person I'm aware of really being attracted to was a girl when I was about six. And then I was very attracted to a girl when I was about 18. Otherwise, it's been men all the way. When you accept that you are probably gay, you do everything possible not to be. I mean, you will go out with girls. You might try and sleep with them. You will already be setting up the state of confusion—repression is not too strong a word—which for some gays continues right through their lives. It took me 49 years to be able to say to a stranger like you that I was gay."

These days he has no such insecurities. In fact, he actively encourages fellow gay actors to come out. But the reflective inner man loathes the label which comes with being "out." He doesn't want to be pigeonholed as a gay crusader, nor a Shakespearean heavyweight. He just wants to be able to do what he does.

"I absolutely don't want to be labeled. I hate seeing myself described as 'Shakespearean actor Ian McKellen,' 'classical actor Ian McKellen,' 'theater actor Ian McKellen,' and what I've read recently, 'veteran actor Ian McKellen.' Jesus . . . !"

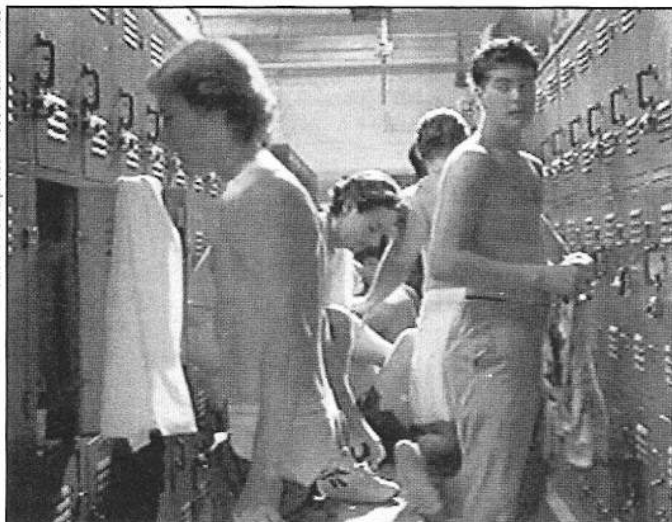
"I've a lot of things I care about, in both my private life and my public life. Film success means that my public life is just a little bit easier to get on with. I shall want to go back to the National Theatre. I might like to wonder whether I can teach. A lot of the young theater people now have lost all the training that I had in repertory. The companies that I had don't exist anymore. I would like to be in more original and new plays. I've got all the stuff I like to do on gay issues; that's very important to me. There are a few laws I want to get changed.

"The worst inequities are on the way to being addressed. The big change is that the media [in the UK] is prepared to discuss gay issues as seriously as women's



The actor as activist: Sir Ian McKellen on his way to 10 Downing Street to discuss gay rights with John Major.

Continued on page 47



APT PUPILS

by Drew Sullivan

Naked Children . . . filmed without the permission of the State or their parents.

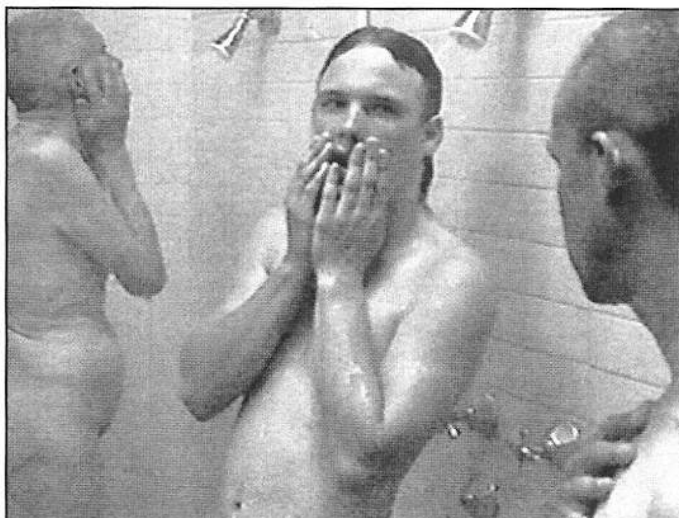
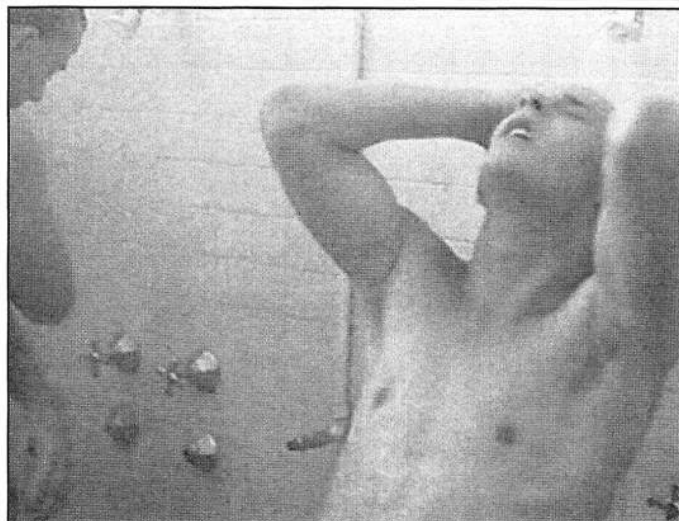
Naked children, hired under false pretences . . .

Naked children in the company of scores of adults who stood silent . . .

When you get right down to it, there's not much difference between the language of moral outrage and the cheap come-ons used to ballyhoo the sort of material that provokes moral outrage in the first place. The "naked children" litany quoted above comes not from a secret kiddie porn sector in the darkest reaches of cyberspace, but from the website of Paul Petersen, former child star of *THE DONNA REED SHOW* and now upstanding advocate for the rights of child actors everywhere.

In the past, Petersen's "A Minor Consideration" website has presented his take on everything from Macaulay Culkin and his battling parents to various crimes purportedly committed by former Mouseketeers. ("Well, officer, he

WIDE EYES &...



had two great big ears . . .") And then there's the whirlpool of accusations that has resulted from the Notorious Shower Scene in last year's critically-acclaimed thriller, *APT PUPIL*. In this case, at least, Donna Reed's former TV son is hardly alone in stirring the soapy waters . . .

APT PUPIL, based on one of the novellas in Stephen King's 1982 collection *Different Seasons*, tells the story of high schooler Todd Bowden, who discovers a Nazi living in his neighborhood and blackmails him into relating stories of concentration camp atrocities. A particularly chilling moment takes place in the school showers, when Todd, after suffering a minor knock on the noggin while playing basketball, hallucinates that his nude classmates are silent, sad-eyed old men trapped in the Nazi gas chambers. It is this scene that resulted in accusations, lawsuits, and a flood of publicity that very nearly swept away the reputation of 31-year-old director Bryan Singer, one of Hollywood's freshest boy wunderkinds.

Singer, who, after making one short film and one previous feature, instantly found fame with 1995's *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*, came to *APT PUPIL* well after it had gained a reputation as a jinx production. An earlier shoot, begun in 1987 with Rick (then Ricky) Schroder and Nicol Williamson in the leads, went bust and had to be shut down. The Singer version was dumped by Spelling Films (no part for Tori?), but was picked up by Phoenix Pictures. Slated to star were gay actor Ian McKellen, who would wind up in a race with himself for an Oscar nomination for this film and *GODS AND MONSTERS* (the latter won out), and teen star Brad Renfro, a former Huckleberry Finn (in 1995's *TOM AND HUCK*) who would find himself smeared by child advocate Petersen as something just short of a porn star. ("The same 14-year-old boy, Brad Renfro, who was present in the now-infamous "shower scene" filmed last April [partially clothed, I should add] was last year filmed simulating oral sex with an adult woman in Ohio . . . a scene not used in *TELLING LIES IN AMERICA*, but filmed nonetheless. Master Renfro's published comments on this oral copulation scene are instructive. "That was the oldest woman I've ever been to bed with.")

So, with a troubled production, the Hollywood novelty of an openly gay star, a director whose own sexual orientation was then the subject of some scrutiny, and a "tainted" teen heartthrob, the stage was set for a shower scene whose notoriety may some day rival *PSYCHO*'s, but hardly for the same reasons . . .

On April 2, 1997, a group of teenage boys, extras in the movie *APT PUPIL*, arrived at Eliot Middle School in Altadena, to film a scene set in the school showers. The four boys whose parents later filed suit against the production (14-year-old Devin St. Albin, 15-year-old David Stockdale, 17-year-old Ryan Glomboske, and 22-year-old Ben Baker, rather old for a boy) claim they had previously been told they would be required to wear Speedos or towels for the scene. They further claim that they had been told that no nudity would be required. On arrival, however, they were informed that there had been a change in wardrobe: no Speedos, no towels, but they'd be wearing flesh-colored g-strings. Shortly thereafter, the boys' costumes were further simplified: to skin.

In language that again seems as lewd as the alleged behavior it condemns, the lawsuit filed two weeks later against Bryan Singer and Phoenix Pictures claims that Singer and his associates "commanded blaringly and

screamingly" that the extras undress, after which the boys spent more than four hours on the set, totally nude and embarrassed by the "ogling, leering, and suggestive glances" from the crew, while an "obviously homosexual" photographer took pictures of them in "indecent positions." Nor, they cried, were they allowed to leave the school or speak to mom or pop. ("False imprisonment," read the lawsuit.)

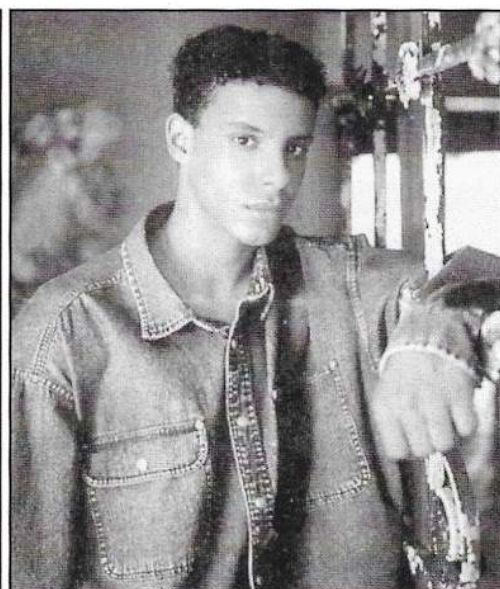
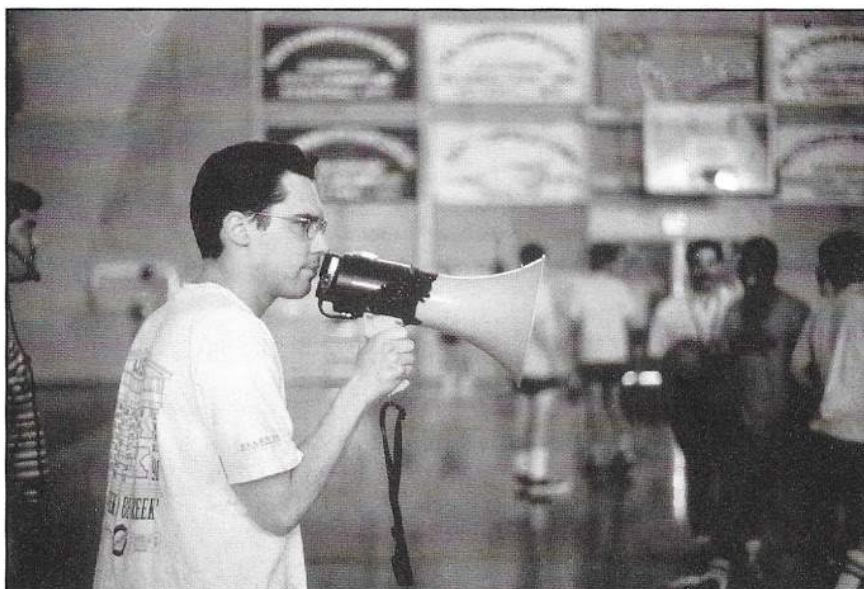
The boys' parents and attorneys weren't content to stop at that. They went on to insist that at least some of the defendants were "pedophiles or pederasts" with criminal records for "child abuse/endangerment and/or other deviant sexual conduct." (Irony, isn't it, that star Ian McKellen is a gay rights advocate determined to get out the message—the correct, not just politically correct message—that the majority of gay people are neither predators nor pedophiles?) The allegations were immediately leaked to KNBC-Channel 4 in California, which skipped the too-hot-to-handle pederast/child abuse/deviant material, but ran with the rest.

In addition to television, lawyers Marty Rub and Peter D. Gordon got in touch with Paul Petersen, who immediately joined in the attack, claiming that Phoenix Pictures had purposefully "misplaced" a video cassette of the shower scene rather than turn it over to the opposition's legal team, and that the studio had provided contact sheets in which certain pictures taken during the filming had been blackened out. Petersen further suggested that a cassette of the nude boys (doubtless in "indecent positions") was circulating at Hollywood parties, and seemed to hint that Singer was known to hang around the University of Southern California film school, where he would pick up male students: "Brian Synger [sic], the director, is an avowed 'gay male,' well-known in the homosexual community with a predatory penchant for hanging about film schools." (Later, in a rash of denials, Petersen claimed that he had never meant to suggest that Singer was cruising the university for sex, and admitted that, even though he'd written about the shower footage being shown at Hollywood parties, he didn't know a single individual who had actually seen the footage at a social gathering.)

In language fairly thundering with righteous outrage, Petersen vowed that, whatever the circumstances, it is strictly against the law to film minors in the nude. Wrong, again. California's criminal code outlaws filming unclothed minors committing sex acts. It is against the law to film a scene for the sole purpose of stimulating prurient interest,

PAGE 44: Brad Renfro bares not quite all in the locker room and shower scenes from *APT PUPIL* (1998). As Todd Bowen, Renfro imagines that his fellow high schoolers have morphed into aged prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp. Bereft of sexual content, the bone-chilling sequence leaves anyone familiar with the scandal surrounding the filming wondering what all the fuss has been about. LEFT: The plot of *APT PUPIL* centers on high school student Todd Bowen (Renfro) blackmailing Nazi Kurt Dussander (Ian McKellen), but screenwriter Brandon Boyce is of the opinion that blackmail of a sort has been rampant behind the scenes, too. There's a lot of money to be made suing Hollywood. RIGHT: Todd is driven to kill in order to keep his (and Dussander's) secret safe.





Courtesy of Campfire Video

LEFT: Bryan Singer directs the basketball game in APT PUPIL. Several extras who were uncomfortable with the nude shower scene were relegated to this scene. RIGHT: Devin St. Albin was one of the minors who claims to have been forced to appear nude in the shower scene.

but there is no ban on filming nude minors for legitimate artistic purposes. But none of this stopped the accusations from rapidly piling up . . .

Pederasty! Child abuse! USC students having sex! As it turned out, it was just as well that KNBC and several other local TV stations passed on the heavier stuff, because the boys' lawyers hadn't a single shred of evidence to back up their claims, not even one report of an arrest. In fact, the lawsuit was rife with inaccuracies, misspelling the names of three defendants and making the "slight" mistake of naming Hollywood producer Scott Rudin, who had severed his connection with APT PUPIL a year before the shower scene was filmed, as a defendant. (Rudin sued Rub and Gordon for defamation; Gordon wrote Rudin begging him not to ruin his, Gordon's, career.)

Most of the crew filming the shower scene, it's turned out, aren't even gay. The majority are straight, including photographer John Baer, a heterosexual ex-cop identified by David Stockdale as being "obviously homosexual."

Furthermore, several extras also present on that fateful day soon stepped forward to refute the accusations made by the fantastic four and their legal team.

Joey Nater (19 years old during the shoot) told *New Times* reporters Jack Cheevers and Mark Ebner that, after completing the film's graduation sequence, the extras were asked if they wanted to appear in the shower scene, and were told at that time that it would involve "some partial nudity and some complete nudity. And they had us sign on a list, who would be willing to do what." Brett Latteri (then 18) agreed with Nater, telling Cheevers and Ebner that the nude scene was explained "in full detail beforehand. They told us it was going to be a shower scene of kids coming off a P.E. period, going to the locker room, taking a shower, and there will be nudity involved . . . Everybody knew what was going on."

Tracy Tibbets, whose 16-year-old son, Blake, participated in the filming, questioned the boy immediately upon hearing the rumors about the filming. "When I confronted Blake after I heard this horrible story that was going on, he was shocked. He could not believe it, because he said, 'None of that happened, none of that went on.'"

When Constance St. Albin, Devin's mother, tried to persuade Tibbets to join in the lawsuit, she refused. "We were told in advance over and over what was going to happen—that there was going to be some shooting with no clothes on. There was not one person that was upset. It's gotten way out of hand."

APT PUPIL screenwriter Brandon Boyce told *New Times*: "It's an absolute smear job. I think [Rub and Gordon are] trying to blackmail people based on their sexuality . . . saying 'we know you're gay [and] you better do this or everybody's gonna know you're gay.'"

Happily, such tactics aren't nearly as effective as they were in the good old days. More and more gay people in the arts—actors Ian McKellen, Simon Callow, Anne Heche, Nathan Lane, and Stephen Fry; writer/director Clive Barker; director Bill Condon; SCREAM-writer Kevin Williamson—have chosen honesty over subterfuge. And those threatened with having their "guilty secret" exposed are simply kicking aside the closet door themselves and, in effect, asking, "What secret?"

Recently, Bryan Singer joined the club. In an interview with "Karel's Kwips" columnist Charles Karel Bouley II, the APT PUPIL director said, "It never has been an issue with me. But I want to be careful to not develop a new first name. I don't want to be seen as 'openly-gay' director Bryan Singer. I just want to be Bryan Singer, filmmaker."

As for the lawsuit, "It's about money, in my opinion. There was a state-appointed social worker on the set, their parents were on the set, and the boys showed up for work the next day. Does this sound like an abusive or exploitive situation? There are 35 other extras that aren't suing."

Neither are the four plaintiffs at this point, because in December 1998 the lawsuits were stopped dead in their tracks. District Attorney Gil Garcetti's office announced: "The evidence indicates that the suspects were intent on completing a professional film as quickly and efficiently as possible, and while it appears that this may have been done in a brusque and perhaps intimidating manner, there is no indication of lewd or abnormal sexual intent. In addition, the content of the film and the circumstances surrounding the filming fail to fall within the definitions of obscene matter and sexual conduct for purposes of prosecution."

Not that it's entirely over, Singer explained to "Karel's Kwips." "When the district attorney threw the case out and found no criminal misconduct, it then went back to civil court. Much of the case has been dismissed there as well, and there are just a few matters even being pursued. It really is amazing to me."

APT PUPIL opened on October 23, 1998, to much critical acclaim and few patrons. Scheduled for release this spring on video and DVD, it may very well find the audience it was seeking on the big screen last year—including those who will be ready with the pause button when the

Notorious Shower Scene appears, eager to see what all the fuss has been about. (They won't see much more than what you'll find on the first page of this article.)

Meanwhile, back at his website, Paul Petersen continues to find APT PUPIL responsible for just about everything except its failure at the box office (which doubtless has been credited to the plaintiffs' call for a boycott). In his best evangelical manner, the Elmer Gantry of child stars spouts: "Look around at your country, my friends. Who is driving this cultural decline if not Hollywood? Have we slipped so far that children are now to be the instruments of our demise as a moral beacon for the world? What does it mean to be a minor these days? Fourteen year olds blow away Christians in the act of praying without remorse. Adolescent gangs rule the streets . . ."

And Bryan Singer has signed on to direct THE X-MEN. What is the world coming to . . . ?



Drew Sullivan is currently investigating the sex scandal surrounding the making of BABE. Okay, not really . . .

SIR IAN MCKELLEN

Continued from page 43

issues or race issues. It's a problem of society that it has to deal with its attitude to gays. Many laws are on the statute books that should be repealed, and the laws are behind public opinion. It's a fact that governments are nervous of gay issues. They are victims of repressive thinking and a fear of what they detect to be homophobia. They're worried about what people will think. This sort of thinking keeps people in the closet, stops people living their lives freely and openly and as good citizens.

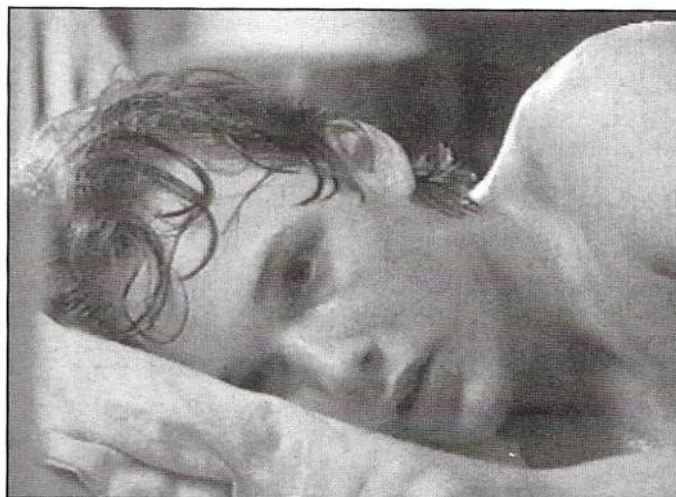
"My life is not as resolutely about being an actor as it used to be. Frankly, if you get a knighthood and you can get a film made, and Steven Spielberg asks you to be in his next movie, you think the career's all right. It's looking after itself. I don't have to start fretting what people think about me. I really don't worry about that anymore; I do what I want to do.

"As for other gay actors, my tendency is absolutely to talk about it because I know they're going to feel so much better about themselves when they decide to come out. Not just actors—anybody. Some people come to me because I have come out and they're having difficulties with it. If I know someone is gay, I ask them very early on after having met them, 'Are you out? What's the situation?'—and that leads to conversations about the implications of being out. But I don't hold classes. My best contribution [to the gay movement] is to go about my business as an openly gay man and talk about it when occasions like this arise."

One gets the impression that GODS AND MONSTERS will be merely the latest stage in the celluloid metamorphosis of Ian McKellen. In it, he will become a fully-fledged, 24 carat, 100 percent genuine film star. It has been a long time coming, but McKellen can chart those storm-tossed seas all the way back to his return to movies in 1981 in PRIEST OF LOVE. The years since have seen his gradual buildup to the parts which have brought him critical kudos and the admiration of his peers.

"PRIEST OF LOVE was a leading part in a movie and [at that time] I'd never played a leading part before. SCANDAL cast me as British politician John Profumo, who was one of the most famous heterosexuals who had ever lived, and it was the first part I took having just come out as being gay. PLENTY had me working with Meryl Streep and Fred Schepisi. THE KEEP was a large part in a big Hollywood movie with Michael Mann, who was just coming up. It wasn't my fault that he was producing, directing, writing the screenplay, and wanting to act all the parts. I won't be working with Michael again . . .

"As I've said earlier, I didn't have any control over what I could do in the cinema at all, so probably I was just pleased to be offered a part. I still haven't cracked it. I go



Todd (Brad Renfro) awakes from a Nazi nightmare.

and see a film with a performance I admire and I'm lost in wonder at how they do it. Some actors seem to spring from the cradle. They're just able to do it. I'm a slogger. I have to find out. It took me 10 years to work out how you got a laugh."

In GODS AND MONSTERS, all of McKellen's acquired experience is there on screen. After the seductive but doomed James Whale, we will see him as the Nazi war criminal in APT PUPIL, from the story by Stephen King. By the time the movie arrives on British shores, McKellen will be 60. It's a grand old age to break into the Hollywood mainstream, but then he's pretty used to breaking down barriers of all kinds.

"The challenge of the Singer movie is that he's 78. I'm always looking for something difficult. If you know you can do it, it's not really much fun. Half the challenge is making sure that you don't come a cropper. I'd like to play a dame in a pantomime. I'd like to have the bravado of standing up in a working man's pub and doing 30 minutes of schtick. That's a challenge. I'd like to do a musical. There are lots of things I want to do. I'll tell you what I have a dream of accomplishing—I'd like to be in a comic movie that people were still laughing out loud at in a hundred years. That would be a very nice thing to leave behind. What a gift, to know that people are going to go on laughing at things you have to do one day in front of the camera. It's a very alluring thing. You just do something, it's funny. It's recorded. People go on laughing. Full stop."

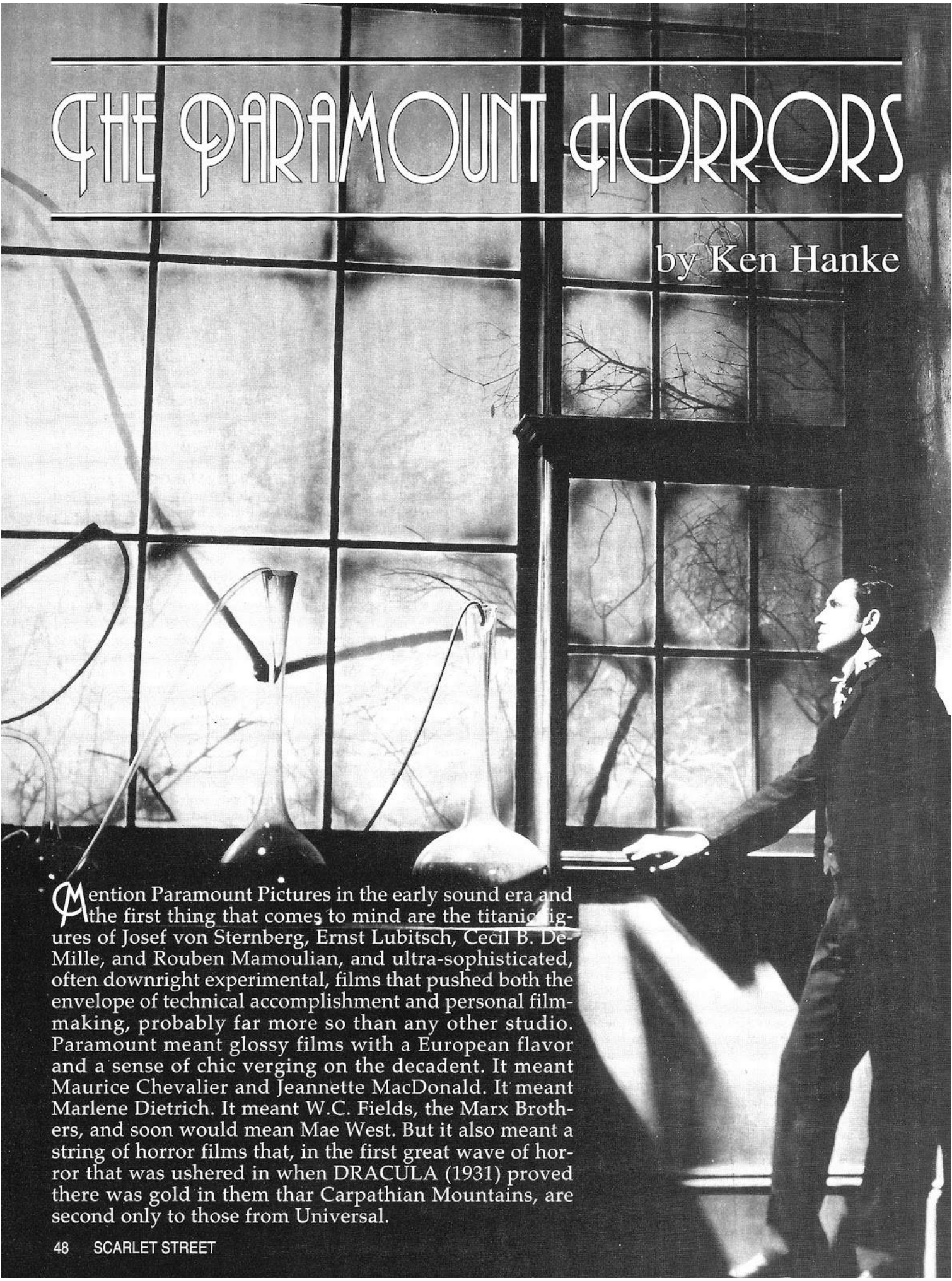
Tony Earnshaw is resident film critic for the Yorkshire Post, in England. He is also the author of the forthcoming Scarecrow Press book An Actor, and a Rare one—Peter Cushing as Sherlock Holmes.

The real James Whale on the set of BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1935) with Boris Karloff.



THE PARAMOUNT HORRORS

by Ken Hanke



Mention Paramount Pictures in the early sound era and the first thing that comes to mind are the titanic figures of Josef von Sternberg, Ernst Lubitsch, Cecil B. DeMille, and Rouben Mamoulian, and ultra-sophisticated, often downright experimental, films that pushed both the envelope of technical accomplishment and personal filmmaking, probably far more so than any other studio. Paramount meant glossy films with a European flavor and a sense of chic verging on the decadent. It meant Maurice Chevalier and Jeannette MacDonald. It meant Marlene Dietrich. It meant W.C. Fields, the Marx Brothers, and soon would mean Mae West. But it also meant a string of horror films that, in the first great wave of horror that was ushered in when *DRACULA* (1931) proved there was gold in them thar Carpathian Mountains, are second only to those from Universal.

In a commercial sense, this was hardly surprising. Universal's success with *DRACULA* clearly indicated that there was a market for such films, and no studio from any era has ever been blind to a good thing. Nearly all the studios tried their hands at the genre. Warner Bros. came close to achieving the results of Universal with *SVENGALI* (1931), *THE MAD GENIUS* (1931), *DOCTOR X* (1932), *MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* (1933), and *THE WALKING DEAD* (1936), all but the first of which was directed by the prolific Michael Curtiz, who, along with William Dieterle, was the most stylish filmmaker the studio boasted. As such, the Warner horror films seem more an extension of Curtiz's work overall than a concentrated effort by the studio to carve a specific niche for themselves in the genre. Paramount, on the other hand, clearly approached the horror film for its own sake, creating a distinctive studio style that was obviously influenced by the Universal films, but had a personality all its own. It was a personality that was wholly in keeping with Paramount's slightly decadent aura and yet wholly surprising in its over-the-top approach to the genre. All in all, the Paramount horrors are the most deliberately gruesome of their era.

Paramount's initial bid in the horror sweepstakes seems tentative enough in terms of subject matter. Rufus King's 1929 pot-boiler novel *Murder by the Clock* had been adapted to play form by Charles Beahan as *DANGEROUSLY YOURS*. Henry Myers then turned it into a screenplay that, by and large, was very much in the twenties "old dark house" mould of *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* (a 1922 play made into a 1927 film). The plot is one of those typical affairs involving a tyrannical, wealthy (in this case) matriarch, a will, and the expected murder-for-profit to get at that inheritance.

All in all, *MURDER BY THE CLOCK* (1931) doesn't look much different than such earlier Paramount mysteries as Frank Tuttle's *THE GREENE MURDER CASE* (1930). The plot itself is of that school (for that matter, the film's long-suffering coroner is clearly borrowed from Dr. Doremus in the Philo Vance novels and films), but *MURDER BY THE CLOCK* brings something new to the proceedings by virtue of its added dose of the macabre. This is approached in a full-blooded manner by both Myers' screenplay and the rather matter-of-fact helming of contract director Edward Sloman, which, while lacking in style, is perfectly suited to the proceedings.

MURDER BY THE CLOCK is a not untypical look at one of those amazingly dysfunctional families that seem to exclusively inhabit creepy mansions in Manhattan, upstate New York, or Long Island. The family in this case, the Endicotts, just happen to be a little more flamboyantly dysfunctional than most. Old Mrs. Endicott (the delightful Blanche Frederici) is an acid-tongued old tyrant, who, for once, has some reason for her irritable mien, since she must choose between leaving her not inconsiderable estate to either her quarter-wit son, Philip (Irving Pichel), or her drunken nephew, Herbert (Walter McGrail), the latter's dubious qualities enhanced by his marriage to the transparently villainous Laura (Lilyan Tashman), a lady

summed up by Mrs. Endicott with, "She's a malicious, designing creature—ought to be hung for a witch. If she comes here, slam the door in her face!"

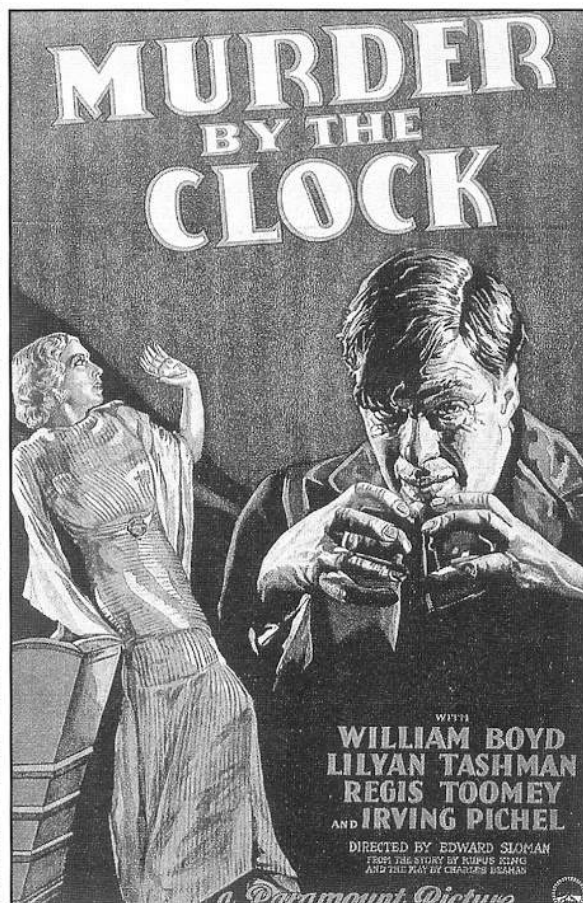
To add to her burden, the old lady has a morbid fear of being buried (or entombed) alive. She guards against this with a specially designed crypt, complete with an eerie alarm that she likes to test out occasionally—no doubt to the delight of the surrounding neighborhood, which might be already on edge with her clearly certifiable son, Philip, wandering about loose!

No sooner has Mrs. Endicott made her will in Herbert's favor ("I don't like you, but I'm going to do what your wife wants. The Endicott fortune must go to an Endicott, so my heir will be either a drunkard, or a beast—a bitter choice. Everything considered, I choose the drunkard.") than Laura, fresh from accepting money from her extramarital

admirer, Tom Hollander (Lester Vail), is at Herbert to do something about their financial state. He tries to put her off by noting that they inherit everything when Mrs. Endicott dies, which he assures her "can't be too long." "Long enough for us to be too old to enjoy it," she complains, further expressing horror at the idea of him borrowing money from his "friend," Hollander. ("Why, you don't think I could be happy living on any man's money but yours, dear!") She points out bluntly, "You would be her heir if she died tonight."

If it appears that the woman's outright perfidy knows no bounds, the viewer ain't seen nothing yet! In one of the film's more stylish sequences, Mrs. Endicott is dispatched by a shadowy figure when she emerges (for no very good reason, except that it's neat) from one of the house's secret passages into the dining room. None too surprisingly—and, of course, with the aid of Laura's insinuations—Philip is quickly railroaded into jail for the murder. Granted, Philip does not exactly do much to appear innocent when the police ask him how he spends his time. "I think," responds Philip. "Well, now,

what do you think about?" he's asked, only to happily reply, "About killing!" He proceeds to demonstrate the ease with which he could do this by twisting and breaking the andirons in the fireplace—which only proves to the film's titular lead, Lieutenant Valcour (William "Stage" Boyd), that Philip probably didn't commit the murder, since the old girl's neck would surely be broken had he done it. This fairly evident conclusion is dismissed by the police in general—more on the strength of the position now occupied by the only other suspects, Herbert and Laura, than on any point of law or logic! Indeed, Valcour's detecting skills earn him exactly one thing: demotion to the rank of sergeant. Soon, Herbert's nerves begin to give way and he confesses to Laura that he killed Mrs. Endicott. ("You mean to say you killed her?" she asks in apparent horror.) The clever lady realizes that it might be best if something were done about Herbert. Her plan is as simple as it is bizarre—she visits Philip in jail and works her charms on him! In what is surely one of the most over-the-top and hysterically tasteless scenes ever committed to film, Laura brazenly sets the murderous half-wit against her husband with





PAGE 48: Fredric March strikes a pensive pose for his Oscar-winning role as DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1932). LEFT: How did the Universal back lot find its way over to Paramount? This stylishly ghoulish set served as an appropriate backdrop for Lilyan Tashman and Lester Vail in MURDER BY THE CLOCK (1931). RIGHT: Karloff, Lugosi, and . . . Pichel? His crazed performance in MURDER BY THE CLOCK almost inspired Paramount to cast Irving Pichel in JEKYLL AND HYDE. PAGE 51: Mr. Hyde (March) cozies up to Champagne Ivy (Miriam Hopkins).

herself as the obvious prize. "I like you, Philip," she coos seductively. "I like you. I like looking at you," leers Philip through the bars. "Wouldn't you like to come real near me? To hold me in your arms?" she purrs, exciting Philip to a crudely erotic frenzy. "Then maybe if you could get rid of Herbert, you and I could live in the house together. Wouldn't that be nice? While you're in there and I'm out here, these bars are between us. Why don't you get out, then?" "I will! I will!" vows Philip, now worked up to a fever pitch. "You know, Philip, he stole me from you, too. I'd be yours if it wasn't for him," adds Laura, easily convincing her new would-be swain of this idiotic notion, and rewarding his promise to get out at night and do what she wants with a kiss—on the hand—an event that transparently nauseates her.

Not content with this new piece of skullduggery, Laura turns her slinky charm on for Lieutenant (now Sergeant) Valcour when she meets him as she's leaving the jail. "I'd like to know you better!" she enthuses, an idea that holds no appeal for the cynical detective. He tells her, "You have a look in your eyes that is characteristic of two types—inspired geniuses and killers." Apparently unable to face this kind of failure without doing something to bolster her ego and hedge her bets, Laura immediately takes off for Tom Hollander's apartment to put him onto the idea of removing Herbert. ("And to think he stands between us. If only he were dead! Oh, I shouldn't have said that.") Her scheme works nearly to perfection. She even manages to be putting the make on Valcour ("Why can't we be friends? Real close friends?") when the murder is attempted, earning his indignant outburst, "I've encountered a lot of alibis, but this is the first time I've ever been one!" The only flaw in her plan is that poor Herbert isn't quite dead and might be revived with a shot of adrenaline—an idea that prompts the doctor to insist that Hollander be brought in so that Herbert might see a friendly face the moment he regains consciousness. As if awakening only to see the man who killed him isn't enough, poor Herbert is then subjected to the crypt alarm going off and old Mrs. Endicott, seemingly returned from the dead, lurching past his bedroom window. The combined effect of all this not surprisingly proves stronger than the adrenaline and Herbert conveniently expires for good.

At this point, MURDER BY THE CLOCK turns from a delightfully overstated macabre thriller to something more

like a conventional horror film, with Laura exhorting the escaped Philip to kill the now inconvenient Hollander, only to find herself the subsequent object of his amatory designs, which he seemingly intends on carrying out in no less romantic a spot than the family crypt to which he carries her. (For once in the proceedings, Laura appears to have genuinely—and understandably—fainted.) Apart from drooling over her supine form and slightly mauling her (a peculiar feature of the Paramount horror films is a tendency for the leading ladies to be handled in a far more overtly sexual manner than in the offerings from other studios), he doesn't get very far before Valcour and the police come to her rescue.

Alas, poor Laura's perfect "clockwork" crime turns out to have one flaw after all—evidence of her having made a death mask of old Mrs. Endicott in order to frighten Herbert to death. (Just when and how she had the time or the foresight to make a mask of the old lady for this purpose is a point the script is disinclined to examine.) Seeing that Valcour has the goods on her, she tries one last manipulatory effort on the detective. ("You're the only man who ever set himself against me and I love you for it . . . and you love me!") However, the cynical Valcour, in best Sam Spade fashion, is only too quick to arrest his would-be paramour, and the film ends with Laura registering genuine surprise as the soundtrack is filled with the sound of oncoming police sirens.

I have recounted the plot of MURDER BY THE CLOCK in some detail, not only because it sets much of the tone for the Paramount horror films, but because the film has managed to become obscure almost to the point of invisibility. Although the film makes it into the pages of William K. Everson's *Classics of the Horror Film* (Citadel, 1995), it has rarely been shown on TV and has never made it to home video, probably owing to the fact that it boasts no big name stars. The pity of this is that the primary delight of MURDER BY THE CLOCK lies in the rich—occasionally even ripe—performances of Lilyan Tashman, Irving Pichel, and, to a lesser degree, William "Stage" Boyd.

The luminous and slinky Tashman (whose career as a world-weary, overtly sexual femme fatale was ended by her untimely death while undergoing an operation for cancer in 1935) is especially delightful as the scheming murderess whose only weapon is the promise (not only does she never fulfill it, the idea seems abhorrent to her) of her

sexual favors. She plays the ultimate sexual tease strictly for villainous fun, which is exactly right for the film, since the men in her life (exempting Valcour) are such unregenerate boobs that her contempt for their willingness to buy into her barefaced posturings and manipulations is not only understandable, but downright satisfying.

Vying with her for scene-stealing honors is actor/director Irving Pichel (best known to horror-film aficionados as Sandor in 1936's *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER*), whose gibbering madman is one of the unsung "monsters" of classic horror. His wildly over-the-top performance is an hysterical tour de force from his very first scene. At first, he seems merely a good-natured moron, but he soon reveals himself as a good-natured homicidal moron. Studying his knife at dinner, he suddenly announces, "You could kill somebody with this," and when questioned by his mother as to what he would do if she and his "keeper" were "taken away," he happily declares, "Kill!" "You want to be a soldier?" she asks hopefully, only to be told, "No! No guns! Knives! Or with my hands!" (The astonishing thing is that it never occurs to anyone that Philip perhaps ought not to be running around loose.) The part, and Pichel's handling of it, is so outlandish that Tashman deliberately lets him have all the scenes in which they appear together, except for the key one in which she visits him in jail. There, she manages to balance his maniacal overplaying by masterfully underplaying her part.

The film itself, as noted, is rarely terrifically stylish under the direction of Edward Sloman, though it boasts a beautifully designed graveyard that would have delighted

even James Whale with its painted cyclorama sky, barren earth, and twisted dead trees. The height of style brought to the film by Sloman—who does manage to generate a certain creepy atmosphere in the graveyard scenes and during Mrs. Endicott's murder—consists of the interesting device of utilizing a ticking clock on the otherwise featureless soundtrack during the murders. (Most of the Paramount horror films use background music.) It's a clever touch that heightens suspense, but at the expense of telegraphing the punches after its first application.

While no world-beater in terms of box-office receipts, *MURDER BY THE CLOCK* sufficiently impressed Paramount that they opted to follow it up with a far more elaborate horror film. This time the project would not be under the guidance of a contract director, but given over to the innovative and almost exhaustively stylish Rouben Mamoulian, who had distinguished himself with the early talkie landmarks, *APPLAUSE* (1929) and *CITY STREETS* (1931). Similarly, this time the film would not hedge its bets by being as much related to the traditional mystery genre as the horror picture. No one was ever going to mistake *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* (1932) for a simple whodunit. This was to be flat-out horror—and if Paramount had had their way, maybe a little too much so!

Impressed by his flamboyant histrionics in *MURDER BY THE CLOCK* and apparently thinking he might fill the bill as their own Lugosi or Karloff (mindless of the fact that he lacked the charisma of the former and the humanity of the latter), the studio wanted to cast Pichel in the title role(s). Mamoulian was aghast at the prospect, noting correctly that Pichel would indeed make a suitable Hyde, but a totally unacceptable Jekyll. With this in mind, he man-





LEFT: During the course of *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* (1932), Fredric March's monstrous makeup becomes gradually more apelike. **RIGHT:** Edward Hyde tries to take advantage of Henry Jekyll's intended bride (Rose Hobart).

aged to convince Paramount to let him have the rising star of *THE ROYAL FAMILY OF BROADWAY* (1930) and Harry D'Abaddie D'Arrast's sparkling comedy *LAUGHTER* (1930). It was a splendid choice and led to an Oscar for the young Fredric March.

While Mamoulian had distinguished himself with the gritty realism of *APPLAUSE* and brilliantly stylized the gangster genre into something wholly his own with *CITY STREETS*, the horror film, with its inherent possibilities for leaving all manner of traditional notions of reality behind, allowed his creativity to flower without any restriction. The results clearly justify the special billing of "A Rouben Mamoulian Production." *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* is every inch a director's film, despite the fact that it contains brilliant performances by both March (admittedly more effective as Hyde than Jekyll, though this is more the fault of the impossibly florid dialogue by Samuel Hoffenstein and Percy Heath than March's playing) and Miriam Hopkins. There had never been a film quite like it—and, despite the fact that it clearly is of a piece with Mamoulian's work overall, there never would be another.

As if to announce that *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* is to be no ordinary film, Mamoulian boldly starts the proceedings with a lengthy and technically impressive subjective sequence of Jekyll playing a pipe organ, discussing his itinerary with his butler (Edgar Norton), readying himself to go out, leaving his house, riding in a carriage to a lecture he is giving, entering the lecture hall, and observing the assembled onlookers. The sheer nerve and panache of the scene is more than enough to make up for its few technical shortcomings, the most notable of which is the obvious reflection of a grip caught in a reflection on the glass in which Jekyll adjusts his clothing before venturing out into the world. Mamoulian later claimed that his intention was to let the viewer into Jekyll's mind, but the scene really needs no defense or justification, and almost certainly exists only because it was a challenge and an innovation.

From this grand opening, Mamoulian never lets up. There is scarcely a shot or a camera movement that isn't gauged for maximum effect. It is all very showy—long, languorous dissolves, elaborate optical wipes that allow two scenes to play at once when in transition, symbolic (often ironic) use of statuary (a Mamoulian trademark), astonishingly fluid camerawork, a unique tendency for the camera to become subjective in closeups—and generally it is very effective, though for years it didn't seem so. Partly owing to the film's very pre-Code sexuality (sex doesn't just enter into *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, it's at the very center of the film and none too subtly) and partly, it seems, just to trim it on general principles, the film was recut for reissue in the late thirties. Nineteen-thirty-eight was a notoriously bad year for the movies and the studios tried to make up for this by rereleasing earlier successes, many of which had been made in the more permissive era before the advent of the Production Code in 1934. As a result, many of these films had to be censored in order to conform to the Code. *DRACULA*, *FRANKENSTEIN* (1931), *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, *KING KONG* (1933), *THE EAGLE AND THE HAWK* (1933), and Mamoulian's own *LOVE ME TONIGHT* (1932) fell prey to this treatment.

For years, these tamer versions were all that was available. (*THE EAGLE AND THE HAWK* and *LOVE ME TONIGHT* have yet to be restored and the excised footage may well be lost.) Easily, the bloodiest victim of these cuts was *JEKYLL AND HYDE*, which suffered the further indignity of being bought and suppressed by MGM to make it impossible to compare with their inferior 1941 remake—a factor that caused the film's reputation to grow over the years in a way that the shorter version could not justify. The truncated version of the film is all speed and flash. It literally flies past with such rapidity that the viewer has no time to absorb it all. Mamoulian's innovative effects seem too obvious and self-conscious and what atmosphere the film has (never its strongest quality, even in its full form)



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is completely destroyed in the process. The carefully built-up and delayed first transformation sequence, for example, is abbreviated by the removal of a section during which Hyde is interrupted, forced to revert to Jekyll, and Jekyll is driven to repeating the experience out of sexual frustration over not being allowed to immediately marry his fiancée. This renders the film too brusque and plays havoc with its entire theme.

Restored and effectively slowed down to its full 90 minutes, the film was finally able to come very close to matching its reputation as one of the great horror movies. Fortunately, this complete version is the one currently in circulation on tape, laserdisc, and television.

As noted, the Mamoulian version of DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE is almost entirely sexual in its motivations. The rationale for Jekyll's attempts to separate the "good" and the "bad" self is first expressed in fairly abstract terms. ("If these two selves could be separated, how much freer the good in us would be! What heights it might scale! And the so-called evil, once liberated, would fulfill itself and trouble us no more.") It quickly becomes apparent that the "so-called evil" is man's tendency toward base sexuality, but what Jekyll fails to consider is that fulfilling this evil might, at the very least, be a desperate and degraded experience—or that the release of this "evil" might in itself be addictive. At bottom, that is what happens—Hyde is an unleashed sadistic sex addict. In essence, Jekyll tries to thwart his own libido, as is evidenced when he confesses to fiancée Muriel (Rose Hobart), "I do love you seriously—so seriously that it frightens me." And, as stated previously, in the uncut version of the film, it is Jekyll's unfulfilled sexual longing that prompts him to turn himself into Hyde so that he may satisfy his desires.

No film of the era puts forth anywhere near so bold a case that the complete thwarting of sexual desire is such a destructive force. The depiction of the extremes to which it leads—Hyde's uncontrolled and uncontrollable sexual sadism—is still powerfully shocking, the scenes in which Hyde torments, tortures, and finally murders Ivy remaining as razor sharp as they ever were. "I'll show you what horror really is!" boasts Hyde at one point. In another sense, that is precisely what Mamoulian is saying to the viewer—that "what horror really is" is something buried within each of us.

From the stunning cinematic pyrotechnics and psychological implications of Mamoulian's film to the overheated horrors of Paramount's ISLAND OF LOST SOULS (made in 1932, but released early in 1933) is something of a step, though perhaps not quite as large a step as it might on first glance seem. The studio logic seems to have been that, having been lucky with one monster and one respected literary source, maybe a whole raft of monsters and another literary source (H.G. Wells' 1896 novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*) might produce similar results. It both did and didn't. The replacement of Rouben Mamoulian with Erle C. Kenton is a major factor in why the film isn't quite in the same league. Kenton was a fine craftsman with a not unimpressive filmography, yet, apart from his horror films (of which this is the first), he was without much in the way of

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is completely destroyed in the process. The carefully built-up and delayed first transformation sequence, for example, is abbreviated by the removal of a section during which Hyde is interrupted, forced to revert to Jekyll, and Jekyll is driven to repeating the experience out of sexual frustration over not being allowed to immediately marry his fiancée. This renders the film too brusque and plays havoc with its entire theme.

Restored and effectively slowed down to its full 90 minutes, the film was finally able to come very close to matching its reputation as one of the great horror movies. Fortunately, this complete version is the one currently in circulation on tape, laserdisc, and television.

As noted, the Mamoulian version of *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* is almost entirely sexual in its motivations. The rationale for Jekyll's attempts to separate the "good" and the "bad" self is first expressed in fairly abstract terms. ("If these two selves could be separated, how much freer the good in us would be! What heights it might scale! And the so-called evil, once liberated, would fulfill itself and trouble us no more.") It quickly becomes apparent that the "so-called evil" is man's tendency toward base sexuality, but what Jekyll fails to consider is that fulfilling this evil might, at the very least, be a desperate and degraded experience—or that the release of this "evil" might in itself be addictive. At bottom, that is what happens—Hyde is an unleashed sadistic sex addict. In essence, Jekyll tries to thwart his own libido, as is evidenced when he confesses to fiancée Muriel (Rose Hobart), "I do love you seriously—so seriously that it frightens me." And, as stated previously, in the uncut version of the film, it is Jekyll's unfulfilled sexual longing that prompts him to turn himself into Hyde so that he may satisfy his desires.

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LEFT: Lota the Panther Woman (Kathleen Burke) and Edward Parker (Richard Arlen) confront some lost souls on the island of Dr. Moreau. **RIGHT:** The conclusion of *ISLAND OF LOST SOULS* (1933) is a particularly gruesome one, as the manimals turn on Moreau (Charles Laughton) and proceed to practice vivisection.

own downfall when Woodford discovers that the fangspread on the reptilian fall-guy is significantly different from the bite marks on the corpse), Gorman turns kinkily amorous with his wife. "I never saw you look more beautiful!" he tells her, fondling her breast. "Yes, I know. Now you're going to make love to me," whimpers Evelyn, who is apparently quite used to this peculiar routine. "I never wanted you more than I do right now!" continues Gorman. "Oh, you're not human!" she exclaims, somewhat tactlessly. "I'm not going to kiss you—you're going to kiss me!" Gorman sadistically informs her, showing off enough teeth to pass for an obscenely lecherous Big Bad Wolf about to take a bite out of Red Riding Hood. When Evelyn threatens to expose his murderous antics, Gorman happily tosses her into the zoo's alarmingly open alligator pit, only to show up the next morning playing at being the bereaved husband when fragments of her clothes are discovered amidst the reptiles.

Such sheer outrageousness deserves an equally outre comeuppance and *MURDERS IN THE ZOO* delivers when a desperate Gorman makes an attempt on Woodford's life, unleashes the animals to cover his escape, and accidentally takes refuge in a cage already inhabited by a giant constrictor. The final image of Gorman, with a huge serpent

coiling around his face, is one of the most gruesome from the period.

Produced concurrently but released about three weeks later, Paramount's next effort, *SUPERNATURAL* (1933), is a film that can best be described as odd. Perhaps sensing a kinship between their own horror films and the not dissimilar over-the-top quality of the Halperin Brothers' independently produced *WHITE ZOMBIE* (1932), Paramount contracted the team—along with fellow *WHITE ZOMBIE* alumni, screenwriter Garnett Weston and cinematographer Arthur Martinelli—to make a horror film for them. The idea wasn't a bad one. After all, the Halperins had made a successful and visually impressive movie for next to nothing with *WHITE ZOMBIE*, so what might they be capable of with a somewhat more solid budget and the mighty Paramount distribution facilities behind them?

Whatever they might have been capable of had they been given a first-rate horror star to help put the film over (amazingly, no one stopped to consider how important Bela Lugosi had been to *WHITE ZOMBIE*'s success) was commercially sunk from the onset by a good, but not terrifically exciting—and generally non-horror film—cast. The film *did* boast Carole Lombard, but this was the pre-TWENTIETH CENTURY (1934) Lombard, who had yet to

LEFT: What is it about Lionel Atwill's expression that leads Kathleen Burke to suspect that he might be mad? It's just another subtle moment from *MURDERS IN THE ZOO* (1933). **RIGHT:** Great snakes! Gail Patrick points out a little sexual symbolism to Charlie Ruggles in *MURDERS IN THE ZOO*.



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find her niche in film. She was a minor star, but not a draw—certainly not the kind of draw needed to put the film over with horror fans.

None of this, however, bothered the Halperins, who were quite content to lavish their attention on the film's visual aspects (which are frequently impressive) and a sufficient quota of shock effects. As with *WHITE ZOMBIE*, they seem to have taken the material with deadly seriousness, but what resulted in a classic horror film the first time comes off as an art-conscious metaphysical thriller that doesn't quite work with *SUPERNATURAL*. (Indeed, the film looks more like a precursor to the following year's Ben Hecht/Charles MacArthur independently produced Paramount release *CRIME WITHOUT PASSION* than it does a follow-up to *WHITE ZOMBIE*.)

SUPERNATURAL isn't a bad film. It is in fact a very interesting film. When it works—and it often does—it's a striking production. As if to announce just how visually oriented the film will be, it opens with remarkably evocative titles that appear amidst lightning and are followed by a series of literary/religious quotations pertaining to the existence of the supernatural: "'Treat all supernatural creatures with respect . . . but keep aloof from them!'—Confucius," "'We will bring the dead forth from their graves.'—Mohammed," and "' . . . and He gave his twelve disciples power against unclean spirits to cast them out.'—Matthew 10:1." Even Val Lewton wouldn't have had the nerve to begin a film with three quotations!

Whether or not the proceedings really warrant this kind of buildup, it does set the tone for the film—and the film maintains that tone for some time. *SUPERNATURAL* proper opens with a newspaper headline: "Ruth Rogen, Notorious Strangler, Doomed to Death—Artist-Slayer Defiant as Court Renders Adverse Decision." This is followed by a quite remarkable montage of increasingly unsavory headlines ("Ruth Rogen yesterday confessed she killed each of her three lovers after a riotous orgy in her sensuous Greenwich Village apartment") and vignettes concerning Rogen (Vivienne Osborne), her trial, her crimes, and her last days in prison.

Ruth Rogen is Paramount decadence in its most virulent form. Still, this is all merely a setup leading to a request by Dr. Houston (H.B. Warner) for her executed body. The reason: in order to conduct an experiment and perhaps—if his theory is correct—prevent the rash of similar crimes that often follow the execution of a notorious killer. Houston believes that these crimes are committed by persons under the control of "a powerful malignant personality without a body of its own"—in other words, they are possessed by the spirit of the executed killer. Further, he believes that he can possibly "prevent her personality from escaping after death and committing other crimes." The idea is certainly serviceable (variations on it extend to the present day, though usually without the metaphysical trappings used here) and the film keeps this aspect of its plot and mood working quite well.

Where *SUPERNATURAL* runs into trouble is in the introduction of Lombard's character, Roma Courtney, who is

mourning the loss of her twin brother and is being taken by phoney spiritualist Paul Bavian (Alan Dinehart). What jars—apart from the film's somewhat overcomplicated plotting—is the level of coincidence the viewer is expected to accept. We are asked to imagine that the same swindler out to fleece Roma is the man Ruth Rogen blames for her execution, and that Roma should happen to enter Houston's apartment at the precise moment when Rogen's spirit can jump into her body! Even that would not be unbearable, but the film spends far too much time setting it up. *SUPERNATURAL* is better than half over by the time Roma becomes possessed!

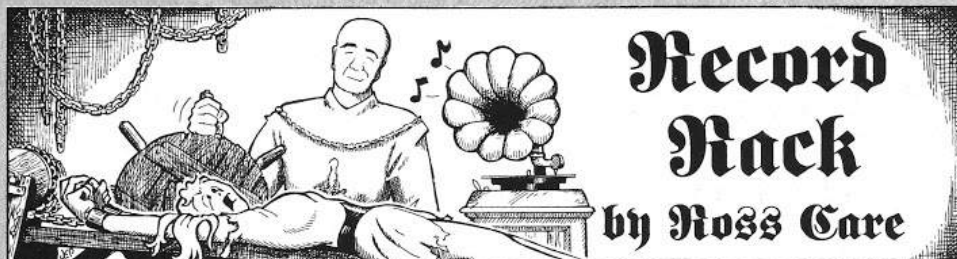
Reservations to one side, the sequences involving Houston's experiments and Roma's possession are visually striking and very effective. The moment when Roma and boyfriend Grant Wilson (Randolph Scott) walk in on the dead Rogen, who opens her eyes just before her body falls over is memorably unnerving. Once the narrative gets to this point, the film regains its stride and maintains it till the end. Lombard is particularly good (at times she actually seems to be Vivienne Osborne) in these latter portions, as she slyly leads the murderous and traitorous Bavian to his death. The seduction scene between the twosome is very nicely achieved (and the seduction very pre-Code, considering the areas of Roma's anatomy explored by Bavian's creeping hands!), leading to an effective climax with Roma very nearly strangling Bavian, who finally is hanged by the machinations of Rogen's spirit after she departs Roma's body. Without ever quite becoming a classic horror film, *SUPERNATURAL* is nevertheless a nicely eerie one, held together by the convictions of its creators and Lombard's performance.

Judging by its copyright date, Paul Sloane's *TERROR ABOARD* (1933), Paramount's last real foray into the genre (exempting the 1934 fantasy *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*) appears to have been ready for release a week before *SUPERNATURAL*, but was held back by the studio until July and then given very short shrift. Subsequently, the film was considered so unimportant that it fell into the public domain and only became known in recent years. All in all, the film is a pleasantly macabre addition to horror history, even if Paramount's lack of interest in promoting it is not hard to understand, since more than any of the other films, it lacked a star to put it over with the public. As in *MURDERS IN THE ZOO*, Charlie Ruggles is around and given top billing, but where he had been nicely integrated into that film, here he is pretty much wasted. John Halliday, though giving a wonderfully out of hand performance as the film's methodically cold-blooded killer, was no name at all.

The plot is simple and designed rather like a gruesome version of the story of the *Marie Celeste*, as a ship is found wandering aimless through the South Seas. On closer inspection, it transpires that there is no one aboard, but one by one a number of corpses, dead in a variety of inexplicable ways (one woman has frozen to death!), are uncov-



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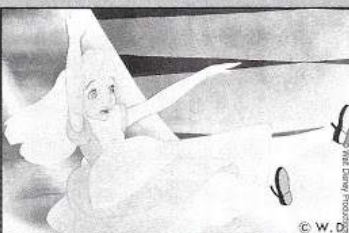


Fun with Alice, Peter, and Lolita
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Record Rack

by Ross Care

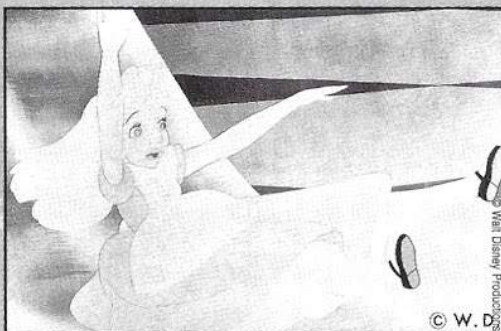
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© Walt Disney Productions



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The Victorians liked little girls, the Edwardians worshipped little boys. Alice is virtuous, charitable and obsessed with good manners; Peter Pan is selfish, flippant and rude. The Victorian child is a symbol of innocence, the Edwardian child of hedonism. In fiction, the former is good, the latter has a good time.

—Jackie Wullschlager, *Inventing Wonderland*

Lewis Carroll (born Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) had Alice Liddell and her sisters, Ina and Edith, to serve as inspiration for his books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872). J. M. Barrie had the five Llewelyn Davies boys, George, Jack, Peter, Michael, and Nico, to inspire him to invent the play *PETER PAN* (1904). Both indulged an obsession with children that would be frowned on today, but was, for the most part, considered perfectly natural in Victorian and Edwardian England.

Carroll could photograph little girls in the nude with impunity, writing to their mothers: "I trust you will let me do some pictures of Janey naked; at her age, it seems almost absurd to even suggest any scruple about dress."

Barrie could likewise take pictures of the Llewelyn Davies boys romping nude on the beach or at a lake, and write a novel, *The Little White Bird* (1902), with a bedroom scene between a childless writer (which Barrie was) and a young boy that today reads today like a variation on Nabokov's *Lolita*:

"Why, David," said I, sitting up, "do you want to come into my bed?"

"Mother said I wasn't to want it unless you wanted it first," he squeaked.

"It is what I have been wanting all the time," said I . . .

The writers themselves would have been shocked to find their motives questioned by a modern-day audience, and there is no real evidence that their interests, however deep they ventured down the rabbit hole of desire, were ever acted upon. (The youngest of the Llewelyn Davies boys, Nico, told Barrie biographer Andrew Birkin that there was never any question of homosexuality or pederasty; as for Carroll, there is only the mystery of a missing page torn from his diary, after which the Liddell girls were forbidden to see him.)

Pictured (clockwise from top right): a nude bathing scene in the 1925 silent film *PETER PAN* (cut from the final print) perhaps echoes Barrie's interests more than was intended; Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and her son, Peter, on the beach in 1899, photographed by Barrie; Beatrice Hatch photographed by Lewis Carroll; a newspaper notice of Michael Llewelyn Davies' death by drowning at age 20 (believed to be a homosexual suicide pact with fellow student Rupert Buxton); Alice Liddell costumed as a beggar girl and photographed by Carroll in 1859; Tina Majorino as Alice in NBC's recent television of *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*, which added a moral to Carroll's purposefully moral-free tale and carefully avoided any prurient subtext.

—Richard Valley



Photo: J. M. Barrie



Photo: Lewis Carroll



Photo: Lewis Carroll



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THE POOL OF ILL-OMEN: TRAGEDY REPEATED AFTER 78 YEARS.



Sandford Pool, Oxford, where Mr. Michael Llewelyn Davies (inset) and Mr. Rupert Buxton, both undergraduates, were drowned while bathing. The bodies were recovered yesterday. Mr. Davies was one of Sir James Barrie's adopted sons; the other, believed to be the original of "Peter Pan," was killed in action. The monument in the picture commemorates two other Oxford men drowned there in 1843.

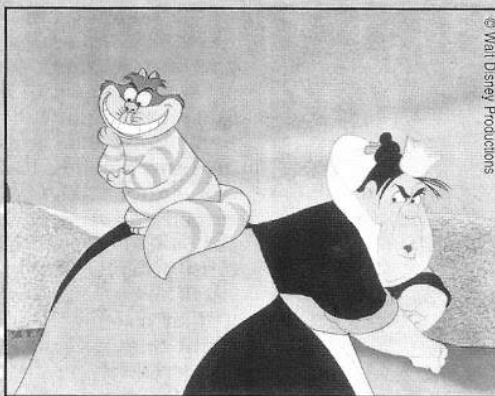
mercial release as an album of original soundtrack songs. (In fact, it was released several times over the years on Disneyland Records' DQ budget line of \$1.98 kiddie LPs.)

In contrast to the amorphously structured ALICE, Disney and his staff seemed bent on turning Barrie's precious plot into a fast-moving and well-motivated adventure yarn. The title character (who had always been played by an actress in theatrical productions) was butchered up and turned into an only slightly pixilated All American Boy (voiced by Bobby Driscoll, Disney's icon of preadolescent angst and trauma), as if even in the blithely naive fifties Disney and his writers had somehow intuited the disturbingly Freudian subtexts lurking beneath the surface of Barrie's touching but sexually muddled tale. (The Freudian wellsprings of Barrie and PAN, only slightly more curious, if certainly more ultimately traumatic than the saga of Carroll's essentially harmless photographic pursuits, are explored in Andrew Birkin's fascinating book, *J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys* (1979), about Barrie's intense involvement with the family whose five young boys collectively inspired the character of Peter Pan.) At any rate, Disney's PAN is a swift-paced saga of Lost Boys and Indians, jealous, easily manipulated pixies (fairies being discreetly in absentia in Disney's text), all enmeshed in Captain Hook's obsessive preoccupation with the lad who cut off his, eh, hand, and threw it to a hungry crocodile who liked the taste of it so much... well, even Disney couldn't exorcise all the rampant Freudianisms latent in Barrie's tale!

But since everything moves along so *allegro con moto* in Disney's version, only the most perverse (like me) will find the time to pointlessly ponder all this, and the score, again the work of Sammy Fain (songs) and Oliver Wallace (score), follows suit. PAN features one of the finest tunes to emerge in fifties Disney, the lovely Fain/Sammy Cahn "Second Star to the Right," unfortunately heard only during the film's opening credits. A number of other mostly upbeat tunes flesh out the appealing score, but, aside from Wallace's charming motif for Pan himself, the underscoring reminds us that Wallace was responsible for countless Disney cartoon shorts (mostly manic Donald Ducks) during the forties and fifties. Still, the PAN CD debuts as a welcome addition in the recent Disney series, and features two bonus tracks: one a bizarre vocal of the Frank Churchill tune, "Never Smile At A Crocodile," which, as performed by Henry Calvin (one of the comic villains in Disney's 1961 BABES IN TOYLAND) is right up there on the psychotronic scale with the recent Tim Curry version of "Davy Crockett."

Lolita (Ya Ya)

Curiouser and curiouser. From Carroll's *Alice* to "that book by Nabokov," *Lolita*, those prescient of the shy Oxford



TOP: The voices of Disney veterans Sterling Holloway (as the Cheshire Cat) and Verna Felton (as the Queen of Hearts) add immeasurably to the sounds of ALICE IN WONDERLAND (1951). Given the advantages of animation, no version of PETER PAN has made better use of the Crocodile than Disney's 1953 cartoon feature.

don's curious predilections will recognize the progression as a logical one. "How did they ever make a movie out of LOLITA?" the controversial film's ad campaign breathlessly queried in 1962. Well, apparently with less hassle than in 1997. Though I, like every other clean-living, God-fearing American have thus far been saved from the corrupting degradation of experiencing the recent remake, I suspect Kubrick's tactfully wicked version may remain a definitive statement. Shot in England in that pre-Beatles era's very distinctive British black-and-white cinematography, LOLITA is a strange stylistic brew indeed, a kind of black comedy cum melodrama cum road movie that, not inappropriately, makes Ramsdale, New Hampshire, the story's allegedly American initial locale, appear to be very much in the neighborhood of the VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED, the distinctive visual style lending LOLITA a not inappropriate sci-fi aura. (Given the proximity of period—VILLAGE in 1960, LOLITA in 1962—the hyper-blond Sue Lyon might

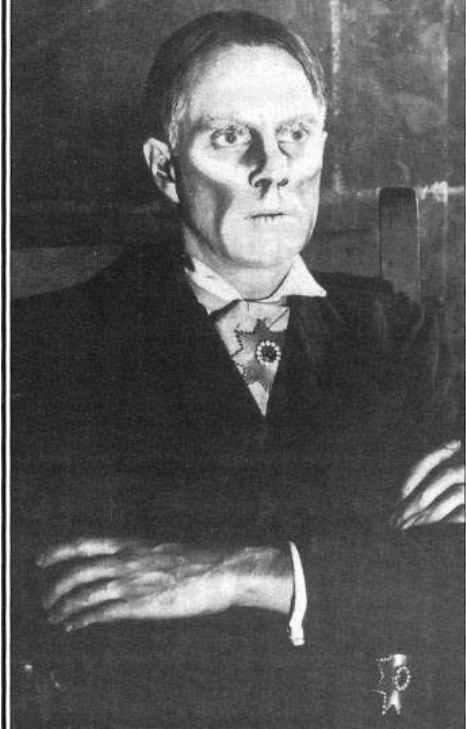
also easily be taken for one of those DAMNED alien children survived into seductive and nubile adolescence.)

According to the Steven Smith bio *Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (Univ. California Press, 1991), Bernard Herrmann was given first crack at scoring Kubrick's film. The mind boggles at what Bernie might have wrought with this property, but he allegedly balked at the insisted inclusion of two themes by a producer's musically-aspiring relative, and declined. Nonetheless, Bob Harris' lyrical love theme and his "Lolita Ya Ya" proved the most listenable tracks on the mixed bag that was the original MGM Records soundtrack album, and both tunes went for the gold on countless movie theme "mood music" albums of the era.

The new Rhino/Turner expanded LOLITA soundtrack seems one of the more unlikely reconstructions of the nineties, and was no doubt motivated by the Adrian Lyne remake. Harris' tunes remain ingratiating, and we apparently get all (and more) of Nelson Riddle's appropriately bland underscoring, the few tracks of which included on the original LP I usually skipped over to get to the more tuneful theme cues. Actually, Harris' love theme is one of the era's more memorable (given that sixties Hollywood did not exactly call forth a succession of new Victor Youngs or Max Steiners). Serious, or a high-camp put-on? At the time, the theme and its glossy pseudo-European romantic piano concerto arrangement seemed to indicate that Humbert really loved Lolita, and "Lolita Ya Ya" was an infectious example of fifties-flavored bubble-gum (first heard on a portable radio as Lolita suns herself in the Haze backyard). Whatever, it's all there on the new Rhino edition, complete with passages from some of the script's discreetly dirty dialogue (including talk about cherry pies and that cavity-filling dentist), excellent stills and period photos (a shot to die for of the film's West coast Beverly Theater premiere), glitzy pop-luxe packaging that retains the distinctive styling of the original LP, and liner notes that try real hard to make a case for the score as ahead of its time lounge music (but then RCA Victor tried to do that with Morton Gould, too). Though this is by no means a landmark score—indeed the pop interpolations (though appropriate in this context) locate it among those scores that marked the beginning of the end for classical Hollywood orchestral scoring in the early sixties—Rhino's LOLITA is a fun package with much to titillate aficionados of Kubrick's cult classic.

Ross Care has written both the script and score for a musical adaptation of Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass, which has been seen in various regional productions across the USA.

Preserving Our Ghoulish Heritage



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by Richard Scrivani

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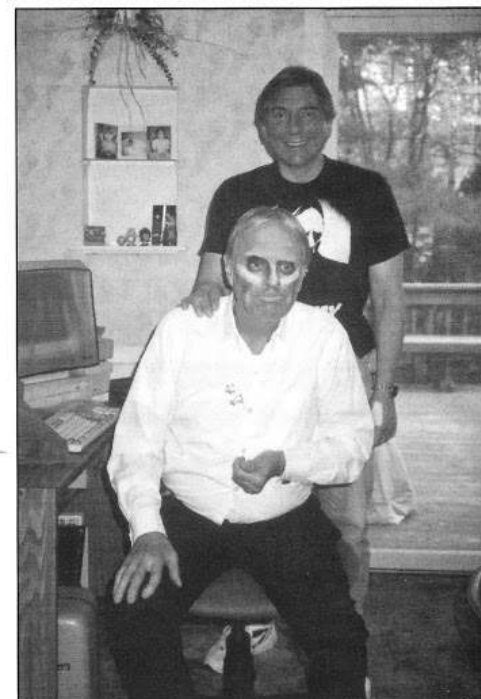
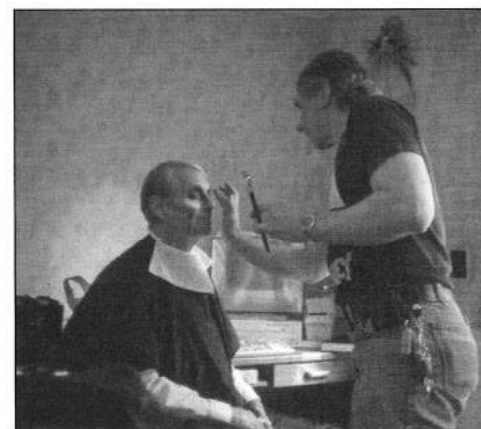
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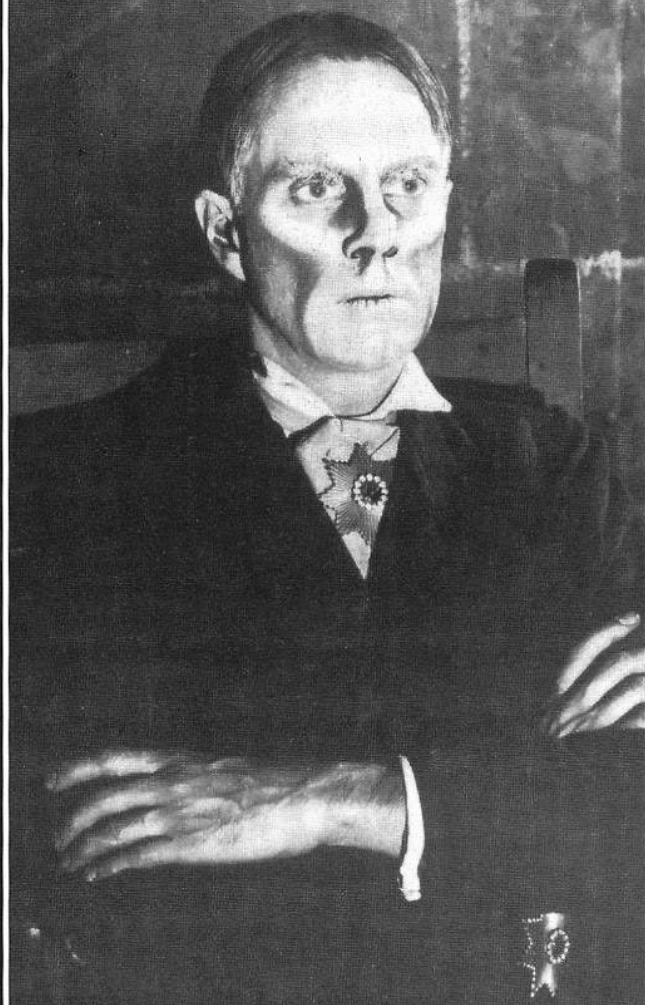
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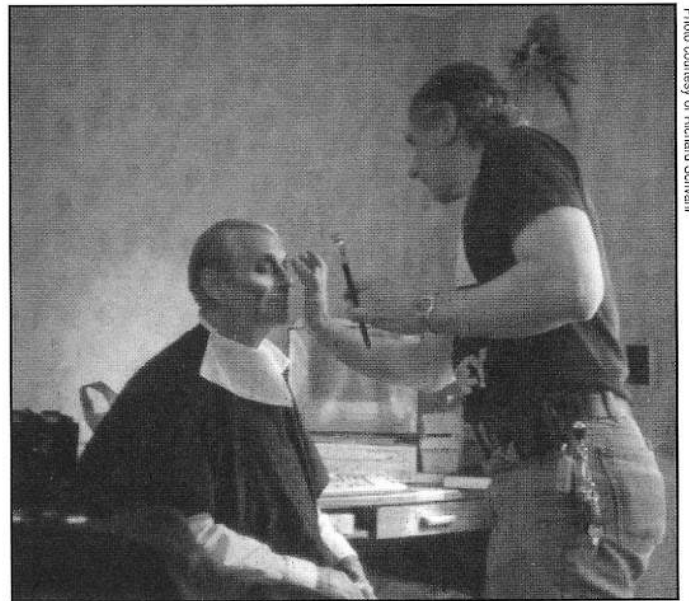


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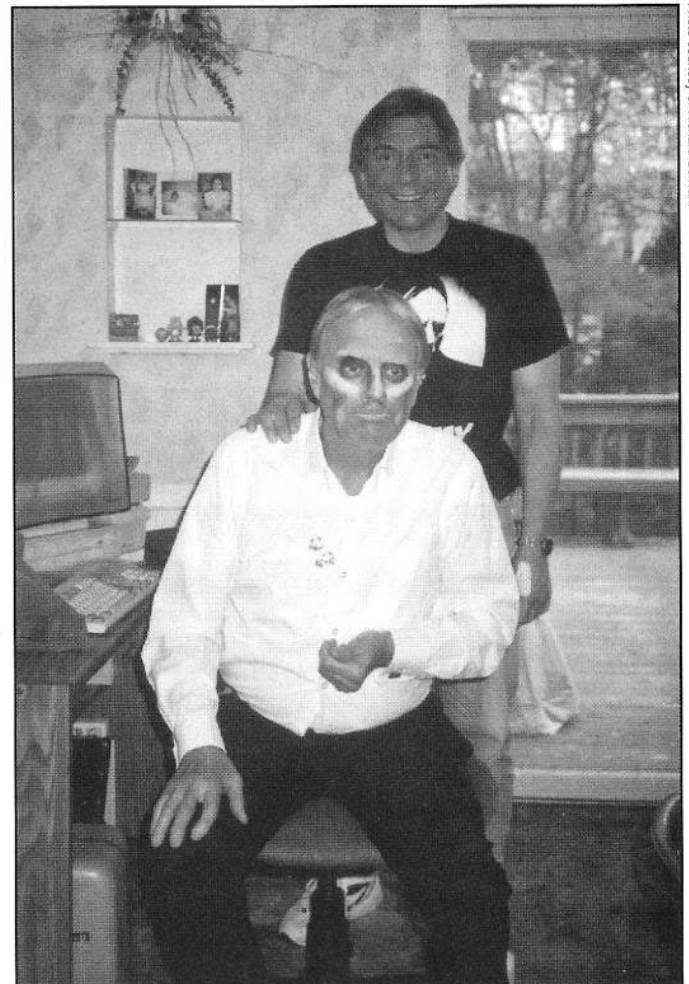


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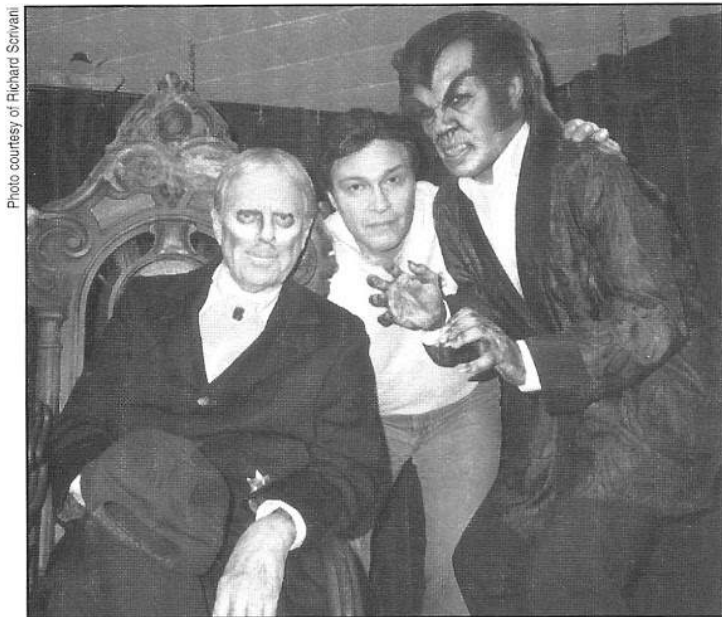


Photo courtesy of Richard Scrivani

Deep in the bowels of Chateau Scrivani, the Master of the House (Richard Scrivani, center) poses with Zacherley (left) and Dr. Henry Glendon, better known as the WereWolf of London (right). Zach was only paying a social call, but the lucky lycanthrope has taken up permanent residence in the basement.

tales of shrinking Gasport (who normally resided in a sack on the wall) and sending him into space would roll off the pages.

Finally Mike Thomas' meticulous makeup job was ready, the lights set for the correct effect, fiberglass cobwebs added to the back of the old chair (which were so itchy to Zach that it became evident on the tape) and the taping went off without a hitch.

After a photo session, Zach shared with us a small array of artifacts sent to him by fans from those first TV years in New York City. Among them were a painstakingly done metal sculpture about eight inches high, featuring Frankenstein's Monster, Dracula, and the Wolf Man, with a plaque reading "To Zacherley—for the most horrible films on television." Also on hand was a beautifully painted map of Transylvania, rich in detail, which took a few of us to unroll. Then Zach set up his camera on a handy tripod and, using a timer, took a "class picture" of himself and the entire crew. There was just enough time left for some pizza and conversation before Zach returned once again to New York.

This time we knew we had what we wanted.

From the very start of the project, Zach was concerned about the juxtaposition of new color footage of himself against old black-and-white kinescopes. Would the color stuff have a negative effect on the ancient kines? It was this concern that led him to suggest: "Why don't we make the whole thing in black-and-white? It would look like an old movie!" While Paul and I resisted this idea at first (we thought the past should be separated from the present by the element of color), Zach was insistent that this be the case. Thus the catch phrase was added, "in Glorious Black and White"—an old expression of his.

The original shows were dubbed, opening titles designed with the help of *Scarlet Street* artist John Payne, and the music chosen. The time had come to put all the elements together. This was done in a four-hour session at the Film Video Arts editing rooms in downtown New York. As would be expected, Zach, Paul, and I had a lot of laughs that night, and everything went smoothly until we reached the HORRIBLE HORROR (a video made by Zach in the eighties) outtake of Zach attempting to sing "Spiderman

Lullaby" from his first album, SPOOK ALONG WITH ZACHERLEY. Paul had laid out end credits superimposed over a second blooper with a different song. It looked great until Zach warned, "No, no! We can't use that, the rights aren't cleared!" What seemed like a simple edit session became a two o'clock in the morning scramble to redo the credits with different audio. We wound up using Zach's spoken intro to the second outtake, stopping short of any music or mention of the song. Over this was a simple white against black credit package. THE ZACHERLEY ARCHIVES was finished.

Finished? Actually it had only begun. We now had to get the finished product into a professionally designed box, complete with bar code and shrink wrap. Using contacts Paul had made from previous video projects, the phone calls began. I was lucky enough to pick the brain of one Lee Pfeiffer, an author and producer of his own line of specialty videotapes, and was saved hours of work using the people he had employed on his projects. ARCHIVES' beautiful cover was designed by Jeff Marshall from a dummy cover done by Zach himself. Zach's mock-up showed his famous Cool Ghoul visage leering out from the edge of the box, "as if I'm peeking around the corner." The idea was, to use Zach's own term, "instant recognition," the famous face so large and the name "Zacherley" so clear as to be visible to shoppers 20 feet away from the store racks.

Jeff took Zach's basic idea and placed it over a "granite" background suggesting a tombstone, added a full moon, and devised a photo offset cartoon logo of Zach holding a candle. The end result was simple, but strikingly effective.

The final weeks before the premiere were anxiety-ridden but necessary, as well as a valuable learning experience. However, when we held the finished product in our hands for the first time—well, you know the rest. The best part was that we made it within 10 days of the video's Halloween 1998 debut at Chiller Theater.

October 30 1998. The Chiller convention celebrating John Zacherle's 80th birthday. A milestone for Zach and a party at Halloween to boot. Could there be a more fitting time for the release of the tape that had been so long anticipated? Looking down at the endless line of fans waiting to meet him glared the Zacherley grimace on a huge poster reproduction of Jeff Marshall's artwork, heralding "First Time Ever on Video THE ZACHERLEY ARCHIVES." It proved to be a long three days for Zach, as he autographed scores of the tapes, photos, and other collectible sundries dug up from the past by adoring admirers. In addition to his usual question-and-answer session, he had to shove off for the Big Apple for a two-hour Saturday night show on WCBS-FM. As if that wasn't enough, upon his return he was expected to perform a handful of songs in the Grand Hall at a midnight celebration backed up by Kevin Clement's group Dead Elvi. I was witness that night to a reenergized Zach (when he had left for the radio show, he looked like he might have been ready to move into a real casket) singing and leaping about the Chiller stage as if he were 40 years younger.

By Sunday's end hundreds of copies of the video had been sold. Zach was visibly exhausted, and decided that if he were to attempt to drive home, he'd most likely wind up as part of the highway, along with whatever other unfortunate souls he might take with him. Much too tired to make the trip, he made his way back to his room as a few of us helped carry his things. Inside the elevator, our favorite monster of ceremonies remarked on all the attention he was getting. Someone responded, "But Zach, you're a famous man." Exhausted, but without missing a beat, Zach murmured, "I'da been much more famous if I'd tried to drive home tonight."



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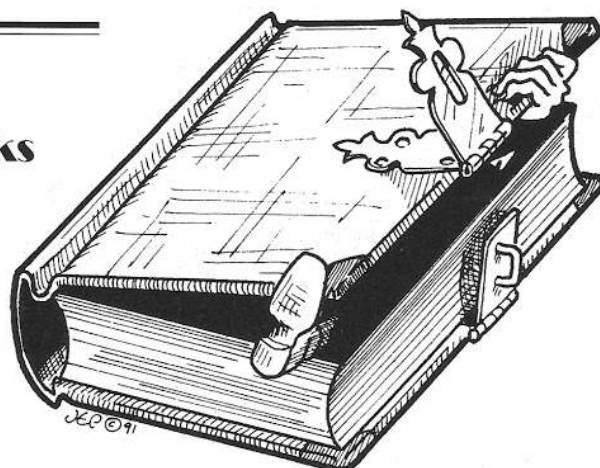
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Jefferson, NC 28640
307 pages—\$59.00

This is an intriguing idea that could have gone very much awry, since anyone writing about Edgar Allan Poe and film has to walk a fine line owing to the fact that so little of Poe on the screen accurately reflects the author's original works—at least in any literal sense. Many of the best films adorned with Poe's name—Edgar G. Ulmer's *THE BLACK CAT* (1934) being the prime example—can hardly be said to be faithful to the original story. Happily, while author Don G. Smith knows his Poe, he knows his movies, too, and isn't a literary snob out to decry how Poe's works have suffered at the hands of filmmakers. In truth, a better balanced view of Poe and film would be hard to imagine. Indeed, the Poe scholar who can come away from the Karloff/Lugosi version of *THE RAVEN* (1935), admitting to its status as "great fun," cannot be faulted in the good humor department! The fact that Smith can balance Poe and "great fun" and an open admission that the film itself isn't very good proves him a film historian of the first rank.

Smith's book is organized chronologically, offering an entry for every Poe film from *SHERLOCK HOLMES IN THE*

GREAT MURDER MYSTERY (a 1908 offering based on "The Murders in the Rue Morgue") through *A TALE OF A VAMPIRE* (a 1992 film based on/inspired by Poe's "Annabel Lee"). All in all, he does right by the films—and he plays fair! Smith is ready to admit when he hasn't been able to screen a given film (he hasn't missed many, though) rather than pretend that he has and adhere to the prevailing critical opinion. The entries are a nicely balanced mixture of plot synopsis, production history, critical response, and Smith's own take on the films. It might have been better to have a little more of his own take and a little less of other people's, since Smith is a sufficiently compelling writer and perceptive critic. That, however, is a mere quibble about a book I would highly recommend not only to fans of the cinematic adaptation of Poe, but to horror film fans in general.

As is always the case with a book that tackles a subject of this scope, there is a necessary limit to the amount of space given to any one film. Still, the book covers the essential Poe films—the old Universals, the Corman films and their offshoots, Stuart Gordon's *PIT AND THE PENDULUM* (1991)—with all the detail one would hope to find, and often a good bit more. When even a seasoned campaigner of such films as myself can learn a thing or two along the way, then



the author is doing something very right indeed—and with humor, style, insight, and, best of all, an obvious love for the works at hand.

—Ken Hanke

SCHLOCK-O-RAMA: THE FILMS OF AL ADAMSON

David Konow
Lone Eagle Publishing Co., 1998
160 pages—\$19.95

Often the best things about bad movies are the stories behind their production. And that's what you'll get from David Konow's *Schlock-O-Rama: The Films of Al Adamson*. What you won't get, however, is a comprehensive look at the filmmaker's work (such as it is), since Konow is obviously a fan who simply wants to cram into his book as many reminiscences from as many people as possible. And he does just that, digging up many of Adamson's cronies and colleagues (as well as quoting Adamson himself) to provide amusing anecdotes about the making of such "classic" schlock as *SATAN'S SADISTS* (1970) and *DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN* (1971). Some of this reviewer's favorites include how, after the motorcycles used on *SADISTS* quit running while out in the desert, they hastily rewrote the script so the gang could pursue their prey on foot; or how Al offered Colonel Sanders a bit part in *HELL'S BLOODY DEVILS* (1970) in order to secure free chicken lunches from the fast food impresario!

Too bad Konow doesn't present such entertaining stories in a more cohesive manner; he throws them in willy-nilly rather than using them as illumination or punctuation for his commentary (of which there is precious little). While whole chapters are devoted to one or two films, there's never a thorough narrative of the production, just anecdotes provided by various people involved—or, in some cases, not involved, but who have a story to tell about some other movie that the author thinks is interesting. (For instance, Dave Hewitt rambles on about his 1972 film *THE DOOMSDAY MACHINE*—which Adamson had nothing to do with—for two pages; and yet another page is devoted to a 1969 film called *FREE GRASS*, with the only connection to Adamson being that it was made by Ray Dorn, who owned Holly-

Quoth *THE RAVEN*—oh, lots of stuff, in the 1963 Roger Corman film of the same name, starring Vincent Price and a feathery Peter Lorre.



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wood Stage Studio where Adamson rented an office.) Unfortunately, the reader never gets a sense of how it all came together. As a result, *Schlock-o-Rama* possesses that same disjointed feel found in so many of Adamson's movies (a feeling not eased by the inclusion of a totally superfluous page-long paean to the author's favorite video store).

The book's best bits are the stories of how Adamson and his business partner Sam Sherman promoted their pictures, such as when Sherman staged a fake protest to generate publicity for *THE NAUGHTY STEWARDESSES* (1973) by creating a bogus organization called "Stewardesses For a Better Image" and having them picket the movie! And I defy anyone with even an ounce of morbid curiosity to keep from immediately turning to the book's final chapter to read the detailed and affecting account of Adamson's bizarre murder (and entombment in concrete in his own Jacuzzi). Also on the plus side, the book is appropriately adorned with off-beat layouts and behind-the-scenes photos (as well as a generous helping of promotion material—whose hilarious hyperbole was often the best part of the movie).

"Fans want these movies to be treated with respect," writes Konow. "We really can't call them 'bad' films. They are what they are: Entertainment." Well, maybe; yet he never makes a case for them or offers any real insight as to why they're entertaining. Nor does he provide any critical (or even noncritical) analyses. "Even Adamson's worst movies had an eerie, claustrophobic quality to them" is about as specific as Konow ever gets. Low on insight yet high on enthusiasm, *Schlock-o-Rama* is really little more than a verbal version of an Al Adamson movie (which, I suppose, is not wholly inappropriate). And, like an Adamson flick, one definitely has to be in the right mood to really enjoy it.

—Bryan Senn

ITALIAN HORROR FILMS OF THE 1960s

Lawrence McCallum
McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998
Box 611
Jefferson, NC 28640
280 pages—\$45.00

The florid, extravagantly stylized fantasies wrought by the Italian film industry in the sixties exert a dreamlike power often sufficient to transcend the obvious deficits of bad dubbing, curiously deadpan acting, and mystifying plots. Such provocative motifs as the fatal woman, aristocratic decadence, possession, and the sinister double assert such a presence in the country's horror cinema as to practically plead for analysis.

Italian Horror Films of the 1960s: A Critical Catalog of 62 Chillers is a library- and-VCR research job, offering little more than credit lists (including pseudonyms where relevant), alternate titles, plot descriptions, and enumeration of actors' career credits. The author devotes two to nine pages per film, with plot

synopsis outweighing criticism by a wide margin. For example, Antonio Margheriti's spectral masterpiece *CASTLE OF BLOOD* (1964) receives a five-page story recap and only three paragraphs of commentary.

Lawrence McCallum demonstrates an enviable knowledge of Italian cinema via allusions to such obscure works as *MA-CISTE ALL'INFERNO* (1926) and *EL FANTASMA DEL CONVENTO* (1934), yet appears unaware of *Video Watchdog* publisher Tim Lucas' scholarship in the field. A bibliography consisting primarily of general reference works and sixties editions of *Castle of Frankenstein*, *Famous Monsters*, and *Monster World* includes only two periodical citations later than 1969.

The text is peppered with inaccuracies, such as referring to Donald Sutherland's drag role in 1964's *CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD* as "the old man," the attribution of a 1977 release to Wes Craven's *SCREAM*, reference to Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava's *I VAMPIRI* (*THE DEVIL'S COMMANDMENT*/1957) as *THE VAMPIRES* (an accurate translation, but a title under which the film was never released), and the misattribution of Alexei Tolstoy's "The Wurdalak" to his cousin, Leo Tolstoy.

The essay on Mario Bava's 1963 anthology feature *BLACK SABBATH* appears to have been written in ignorance of AIP's chop-job, which included shuffling the story sequence and rescripting one episode to eliminate a lesbian subtext. McCallum's praise of Bava's abstention from graphic violence in the 1961 *BLACK SUNDAY*'s stake-through-the-eye scene betrays his unfamiliarity with the director's cut.

Even more frustrating than scattered errors are the regions left unexplored: terms such as Super Totalscope and Colorscope go unexplained, the identity of the Woolner Brothers (who imported 1961's *HERCULES IN THE HAUNTED WORLD*, 1964's *BLOOD AND BLACK LACE*, and 1964's *CASTLE OF BLOOD*) remains a mystery, and differences between American and Italian cuts are seldom noted. Behind-the-scenes information is negligible, and neither dubbing credits, interviews, nor secondary-source quotes are provided.

Lacking both in-depth critical inquiry and the engagement of primary research, *Italian Horror Films of the 1960s* never approaches the benchmark of quality established by such classic McFarland filmographies as Bill Warren's *Keep Watching the Skies!* and Bryan Senn's *Golden Horrors*. Despite the fecundity of the subject matter, a definitive English-language study of the Golden Age of the Italian horror film remains to be written.

—Michael Draine



Two "archetypal characters" from *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1939)—Ygor (Bela Lugosi) and the Frankenstein Monster (Boris Karloff).

CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

Randy Loren Rasmussen
McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998
Box 611
Jefferson, NC 28640
269 pages—\$36.50

"One of the most intriguing aspects of classic horror films is that they contain a clearly defined set of character types through which conflicts of good and evil are portrayed." So begins Randy Loren Rasmussen's *Children of the Night: The Six Archetypal Characters of Classic Horror Films*. Rasmussen breaks down said types into six categories: Heroines, Heroes, Wise Elders, Mad Scientists, Servants, and Monsters, devoting a chapter to each in which he utilizes a total of 102 different horror films from the 1930s and 1940s to illustrate his points.

Coming from an academic and professional background in psychology, I viewed this volume's subtitle with some trepidation. Having learned how to write like a social scientist myself (a "skill" I've had to unlearn in penning my own film books), I know how the result can easily be formalized, dry, and downright dull. Fortunately, this volume doesn't sound like somebody's doctoral dissertation, and Rasmussen, while not exactly folksy in his style, manages to strike a good balance between scholarly and readable.

That said, *Children of the Night* is certainly written for a very select audience (of which this reviewer is decidedly a member). First, one truly needs to be a diehard fan of Golden and Silver Age horror movies to appreciate this book (since Rasmussen often takes it for granted that the reader has some familiarity with the plot and characters of these films). Second, one has to appreciate the kind of psychological and character analyses that result in insightful (to my mind anyway) observations along the lines of Dracula's Daughter's aversion to mirrors demonstrating "the traditional vampire fear of exposure being in this case a metaphor for self-loathing." In speaking of *BEDLAM* (1946), Rasmussen offers this fascinating and spot-on perception: "The hero [William, a Quak-

er] and heroine [Nell] are mirror images of one another. For all his virtue, William lacks passion. On the other hand, Nell's judgement is often ruled by passion. In the end, wisdom seems to be a compromise between the two."

Cinematically, the author obviously knows his stuff, especially when espousing such insights as "SON OF KONG is that rare horror film in which the heroine and hero are perhaps more interesting than the monster." He tends to muddy the water a bit, however, by including such (at best) borderline horrors as *THE MAD GENIUS* (1931), *NIGHT*

OF TERROR (1931), and *THE FACE BEHIND THE MASK* (1941), as well as two out-and-out non-horrors—the murder meller *JUGGERNAUT* (1936) and the crime drama *NIGHT KEY* (1937), which at one point Rasmussen admits "is more a cops-and-robbers than a horror film." (So why include it?) Also, the text gets rather tedious and repetitious at times as he trots out example after example and film after film (sometimes reiterating the same plot device or story background over and over again in succeeding chapters). But for every dip in interest, there's a high spot that makes the reader sit up

and take notice, offering a new perspective on an old favorite.

You won't find any production info, behind the scenes stories, or interviews here (which, after all, have been covered in numerous books and countless articles). What you will find is a frequently fresh way of looking at familiar films and characters (not to mention a good photo mix of the well-known and the rare)—a useful service for the dedicated fan of thirties and forties horror.

—Bryan Senn



DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY

Continued from page 26

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. I said, "Is Freddy giving you any trouble?" And she rolled her eyes and said, "Oh yes."

Mitchell Leisen: The effect this film had on people was quite amazing. We were Paramount's second highest grosser of the year, right behind Mae West, so a lot of people saw it. We had seven or eight thousand letters come in from people all over the country, saying that they no longer feared death. It had been explained to them in such a way that they could understand the beauty of it. The son of a very dear friend of mine had committed suicide, and she was terribly broken up over it. I took a flying chance one day. I took her to the projection room and left her there alone and had *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* run for her. She came out a completely different person. She said, "You've explained death, you've made it beautiful to me. I no longer feel the way I did." This was worth a great deal to me, and made the effort of doing it worthwhile if you could affect that many people and explain something they have been horrified of. As Death himself says, "Why do men fear me?"



SEX TAKES A HOLIDAY

Continued from page 27

Leisen underwent years of psychoanalysis (which he put to good use in *LADY IN THE DARK*), but he found that the best way to deal with his personal problems was incessant activity. It was typical of him to think that he could keep all of his relationships going, like so many plates spinning in the air, and for many years he did. In the late forties, however, they all came crashing down. After her miscarriage, Natalie Visart refused to see him for several years. His wife asked for a divorce, which he gave, but when her remarriage plans fell through, she collapsed and was sent to a mental institution. Although he was no longer legally responsible for her, Leisen paid all the bills. With movie work thinning out in the fifties, Billy Daniels went off for a long assignment in Germany. When he came back, he found that Mitchell no longer wanted to live with him—though he allowed him to sleep in his studio on La Cienega Boulevard. He had contracted an illness that made him gain a lot of weight and was no longer attractive. When Billy Daniels passed away, Leisen said it was suicide through an overdose of prescription drugs, but the official reason was a heart attack.

The late forties also brought many changes at Paramount. The studio had cleverly stockpiled a lot of unreleased films during the final months of World War II knowing that there would be strikes as soon as peace was declared. Therefore production was way down in 1946, 1947, and 1948, and the studio didn't try to resign important stars and writers when their contracts expired. With

the dismal box office of 1948 and 1949 came a new edict that no film could cost more than \$500,000 (other than DeMille epics). Leisen's reputation for extravagance (plus his own high salary) made a new management eager to let him go, but his agent, Charles Feldman, staved this off for several years and Leisen's last three Paramount films, *NO MAN OF HER OWN* (1950, based on the 1948 Cornell Woolrich novel *I Married a Dead Man*), *THE MATING SEASON* (1951), and *DARLING, HOW COULD YOU!* (1951) were made cheaply, quickly, and well. (Feldman also represented Edmund Goulding and was somewhat more successful in keeping him working through the fifties.)

Health problems also plagued Leisen and, according to Anne Baxter, he was terrified of the CinemaScope screen. After being fired from *BEDEVILLED* (1954), a modest budget Scope thriller shot in Paris, he returned to the States, saw George Cukor's *A STAR IS BORN*, and wrote Cukor a letter praising how he had used the unfamiliar shape to such advantage. Cukor apparently did not reply.

After one last feature (*THE GIRL MOST LIKELY*, in 1956), Leisen turned to television to pay the bills. Some of his episodes of *THRILLER*, *TWILIGHT ZONE*, and *G.E. THEATER* are still being shown today. Of this work he would later say, "You have to keep your hand in, even if your heart's not in it." He died in 1972.



A birthday celebration on the set of *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* (1934) for director Mitchell Leisen's lover, Eddie Anderson (not to be confused with that other Eddie Anderson, Rochester). Among those seated: Kent Taylor, Evelyn Venable, Anderson, and Sir Guy Standing. (Yes, that's right; Standing is seated.) Among the standing: Gail Patrick, who went on to produce *PERRY MASON* on television in the fifties and sixties) and Leisen, who would later lose Anderson to Shirley Ross on the set of *THE BIG BROADCAST OF 1938* (1938).





John Halliday, perhaps best known for his role as Katharine Hepburn's philandering father in *THE PHILADELPHIA STORY* (1940), was the ruthless killer in the clever *TERROR ABOARD* (1933).

THE PARAMOUNT HORRORS

Continued from page 57

ered. When it's discovered that the ship is on fire, it is abandoned and the story jumps back in time to reveal what really happened—and what happened was that Maximilian Kreig (John Halliday) had been indicted for forgery and grand larceny and, rather than face the consequences, decided to murder the entire crew and passengers and disappear to an unnamed, uncharted island! "The ideal situation would be if the boat didn't dock at all," he calculates. "That's a pretty tall order, sir," opines the ship's radio operator, Wilson (William Janney). "Oh, I don't know," Kreig reasons. "I wouldn't say it was impossible—a determined man in a desperate situation might destroy a boat and every living soul on board." Then he casually picks up a gun and plugs the poor fellow! (Not only is the violence depicted shockingly offhand and cool, but *TERROR ABOARD* is unique for its time in that the dead man's coat is actually liberally stained with blood.)

This premise is basically all there is to the film—Kreig systematically murdering or arranging the murder of "every living soul on board." (As such, the film is almost a forerunner of the kind of "creative death" film "perfected" by *THE OMEN* series in the seventies.) It isn't great filmmaking, but it does turn out to be a great deal of grisly fun. Kreig's assured manipulation of his victims is almost reminiscent—if you substitute urbanity for sex—of Laura's in *MURDER BY THE CLOCK*. A few well-chosen words planting an idea and he engineers one murder to be committed for him (while he placidly crosses the victim's name off the passenger list). The next victim, Millicent Hazlitt (Veree Teasdale), he casually locks in the meat freezer, turning the temperature as low as possible. The chef (Paul Porcasi) is then poisoned (with the event made to look like Kreig himself was the intended victim), suspicious maid Lena (Leila Bennett) is calmly dumped overboard, ship's captain Alison (Thomas Jackson) is memorably (and gruesomely) impaled on a desktop pen set, manipulated murderer Gregory Cordoff (Jack LaRue) is then manipulated into hanging himself, and a lifeboat full of deserting sailors is rigged to plummet into the ocean—whereupon the film returns to its opening, and we find Kreig setting the ship on fire and trapping his ex-fiancée Lili Kingston (Shirley Grey) and her true love James Cowles (Neil Hamilton) in the engine room.

As luck would have it, they—and Charlie Ruggles, of course, as Blackie Witherspoon—are rescued, while Kreig's attempted escape is thwarted when he swims afoul of a hungry shark! The only possible quibble that one can have with a film this cheerfully bloodthirsty is that director Paul Sloane (whose more important credits are a few of the better Wheeler and Woolsey pictures) seems incapable of generating any atmosphere at all. That may be asking too much, though, for a 67-minute programmer that boasts a higher body count than the most graphic *FRIDAY THE 13TH* movie! It is not, perhaps, quite the high note on which one would like to see Paramount's 1933 offerings conclude, but neither is it a disgrace to the other films.

With 1934, the Paramount horror films underwent a significant change—as did many films, in light of the new production code. The willful gruesomeness of the earlier films was rarely seen, and the year was brought in with Mitchell Leisen's beautiful romantic fantasy, *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*. The film certainly had its moments of horror—most notably when Death in human form as Prince Sirki (Fredric March) willed Gail Patrick to "know who I am" and his human face became a startling death's head—but at bottom it was more grim fantasy than horror. It was also unusual in that it was the first of the Paramounts, apart from the less studio originated *SUPER-NATURAL*, to boast a significant degree of underscoring, largely—and very effectively—in the form of Sibelius' "Valse Triste."

Henry Hathaway's *THE WITCHING HOUR*, released a few months later, was in a not wholly dissimilar vein, though the elements of romantic fantasy were here mingled with a singularly bizarre, and scientifically doubtful, story of hypnotic suggestion and murder. Adapted from "the celebrated stage play by Augustus Thomas" (all of the studio's 1934 horror films had theatrical origins), the property had been filmed by Paramount once before in 1921. (Then, the hypnotism angle was undoubtedly more of a novelty.) Even at the time of its release, *Variety* noted that the lack of a big name star was likely to hurt the film, and the intervening 65 years have only worsened that problem. Apart from Judith Allen, who would almost certainly be unknown today had she not played W.C. Fields' daughter in *THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY* (1934), the entire film is made up of character actors in star turns. The result, of course, is that there is virtually no interest in reviving what is essentially a fragile romance with melodramatic underpinnings.

The unfortunate thing about the probably insurmountable obscurity of *THE WITCHING HOUR* is that not only is it a fine minor work that deserves repeat viewings, but it is an excellent showcase for several exceptional character players, most especially Sir Guy Standing. Standing, who also appeared in *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY* and would take part in Paramount's subsequent 1934 thriller, *DOUBLE DOOR*, was and is best known for playing solid fatherly types and distinguished professionals with an air of unforced sincerity. In *THE WITCHING HOUR*, decked out to an almost unrecognizable degree in a special character makeup and using a voice that only occasionally sounds like him, Standing plays a retired art-fancying judge, Martin Prentice, who takes on a seemingly impossible case at the behest of the ghost of his long-lost sweetheart, who wants him to defend her grandson (Tom Brown) on a murder charge. His performance is nothing short of revelatory in what is probably the best chance the movies ever gave him. Equally good is *TERROR ABOARD*'s John Halliday as Jack Brookfield, a gambling-house owner and suave art collector with unusual mental powers. Here, Halliday evinces all the charm—and none of the lethality—he showed in the earlier film. A nearly perfect lineup of other notable character actors, including Richard Carle, Purnell Pratt, William Frawley, and, best of all, Ferdinand Gottschalk, rounds out the film.

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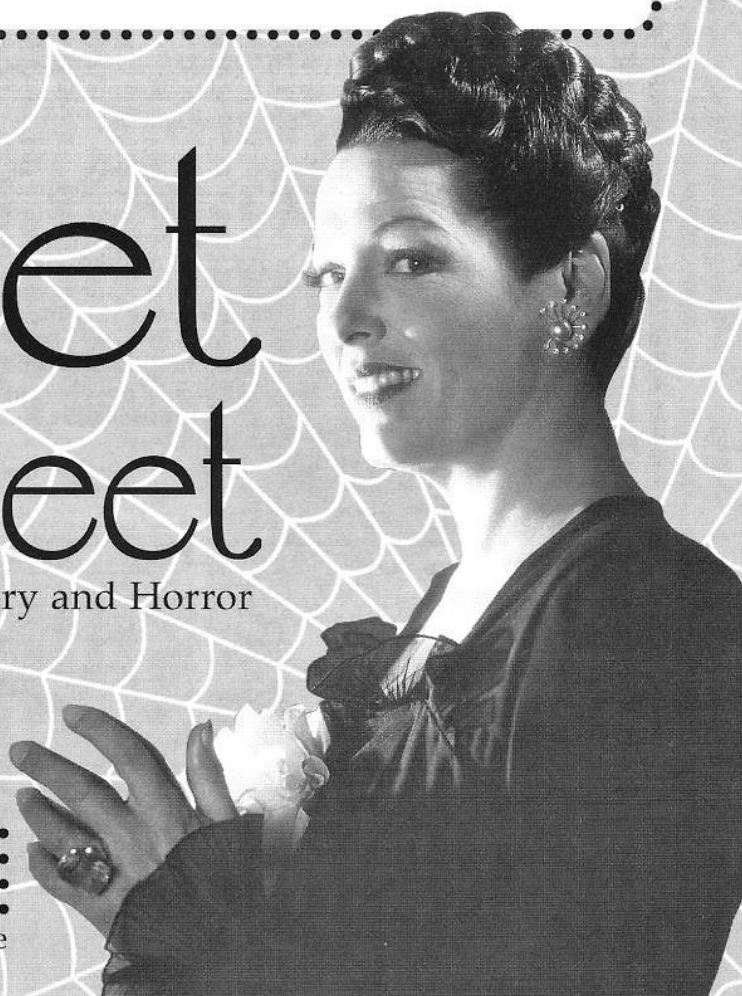
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Stage actress Mary Morris repeated her theater role as Victoria Van Brett in *DOUBLE DOOR* (1934), here menacing Anne Revere (also repeating her theater role as Victoria's sister).

The quaint and improbable story line works on the premise that Clay Thorne (Brown) murders a loathsome gambler/informer named Hardmuth (Ralf Harolde) after Brookfield inadvertently hypnotizes the young man and places the suggestion in his mind. ("One of these days somebody's going to come into your office, stick a revolver against your head, and quietly and justifiably blow your brains all over the place," Brookfield informs Hardmuth while Thorne is in an accidental trance.) It then falls to Martin Prentice to prove to a skeptical jury (headed up by William Frawley) that Thorne was not responsible for his actions, leading the film to an unusually strong and enjoyably melodramatic courtroom climax, complete with hypnosis and a bit of judicial theatricality that would shame Perry Mason!

THE WITCHING HOUR was obviously a chance for Henry Hathaway to move out of the realm of Westerns and action pictures into something different. The studio was sufficiently pleased with the results to award him the assignment of the more overtly supernatural (but not at all horrific) *PETER IBBETSON* the following year, with a more impressive roster of box-office names. As with *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*, *THE WITCHING HOUR* was more heavily underscored than the previous films, albeit less successfully, since the background music consists entirely of sentimental period songs used to bolster the film's vaguely defined old south setting.

At bottom, *THE WITCHING HOUR* is a fairly serious work that attempts, somewhat simplistically, to explore such topics as thought transference and other aspects of

extrasensory perception. Equally simplistic, but far from serious or thoughtful, is Charles Vidor's *DOUBLE DOOR*, released the same month. Adapted by Gladys Lehman and Jack Cunningham from "The Play That Made Broadway Gasp" (or so the credits assure us) by Elizabeth A. McFadden ("Suggested by Hermine Klepac"), *DOUBLE DOOR* is a singularly peculiar enterprise. The play may have made Broadway gasp, but *Variety* refers to the play as a "minor success," suggesting that it perhaps did not make a great deal of Broadway gasp. It was, however, successful enough to warrant not only purchasing the property, but securing the services of the play's star, Mary Morris, to repeat her role as the evil Victoria Van Brett. Morris even receives somewhat odd special billing via a huge closeup that appears three times in the titles—twice moving toward the camera and "shattering" the credits! Even so, Miss Morris takes second billing to the studio's own Evelyn Venable, who, despite her success as the ethereal Grazia in *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*, never quite attained the status of a box-office name. (Nor did her onscreen romantic interest, Kent Taylor, with whom she is here once again paired.)

What is especially odd about the film is that Paramount went to the trouble of obtaining the play and Morris, but then appears to have cut corners in every other department. Even the music, again limited to the credits as in the earlier films, is on the cheap, with the main title accompanied by the same orchestration of the Bach Tocatta and Fugue that had graced Mamoulian's *JEKYLL AND HYDE* three years earlier.

Despite its obvious economies, *DOUBLE DOOR* is good fun without ever managing to be particularly horrific, despite Charles Vidor's damndest efforts (this was Vidor's first "important" film) to inject atmosphere into the proceedings. Vidor manages some very effective use of the moving camera and has a nice, if illogical, penchant for shooting down on his characters while having them lit from below. (The most notable instance of this is in one of the film's almost arbitrary bits of morbidity, when the housekeeper shows off the urns containing the ashes of Victoria Van Brett's mother and father. "The real ashes?" asks the horror-stricken maid. "The actual ashes," assures the housekeeper!) It's enough to make the film constantly nice to look at, but not enough to make up for the somewhat tepid material and the curious insistence on preserving the piece's theatricality by never allowing us to enter the mysterious soundproofed "sleeping room" behind the secret-passage double door of the title. (Nor do we ever learn why Victoria can nip into this room unharmed when it suits her purpose, but lets out a scream when she enters it at the film's presumably gasp-inducing climax.)

The plot of *DOUBLE DOOR* is hardly exciting in itself. Family-honor mad Victoria Van Brett is out to discredit her half-brother's (Taylor) socially inferior bride (Venable as the now-improbably named Anne Darrow!), and, failing that, to kill off the hapless girl. While the story offers room for an appallingly wide range of psychosexual subtexts, it never explores them and is simply given to the viewer on a take-it-or-leave-it basis of blood and thunder melodrama. Ultimately, despite some fine character work from Sir Guy Standing and Halliwell Hobbes (the latter having a nice scene of the most blatantly expository nature), the film rises or falls on the performances of Anne Revere as Victoria's much abused sister, Caroline, and Morris' Victoria. Revere is exceptional as quite the most human and likable character in the film. Morris, on the other hand, is deliciously evil. Though her role is devoid of much in the way of comprehensible motivation, she is one of the more hissable human monsters of classic horror. For these performances and Vidor's efforts at atmosphere, the film deserves a more prominent place in horror history.

One of the frequent critical complaints about *DOUBLE DOOR* is that it lacks humor. This is a charge that can

scarcely be denied—a more straight-faced 75-minutes could scarcely be imagined. That, however, was far from the case with Paramount's last shot at a horror film in the thirties—*MENACE*, a project with an interesting history in that it was originally slated to be directed by Mitchell Leisen. Unfortunately, Leisen bowed out, presumably to tackle the more important (though almost equally forgotten) *FOUR HOURS TO KILL*, which featured two of *MENACE*'s players, Gertrude Michael and Ray Milland, in supporting roles. This landed the property in the hands of Ralph Murphy, a singularly uninspired filmmaker who kept the proceedings going at a good pace and had some connection to this sort of material as one of the authors of the play, *SH! THE OCTOPUS*. Murphy's pacing certainly helped the film—which can best be described as fun—but it's difficult not to wonder how much more stylish the fun might have been under Leisen's direction.

The Anthony Veiller screenplay, though technically based on a Philip MacDonald story, seems to owe much to Roy William Neill's Columbia release seven months earlier, *THE NINTH GUEST*, which was based on a play by Owen Davis and the 1930 novel, *INVISIBLE HOST*. (*THE NINTH GUEST* would be trotted out and the horror quotient upped in 1939 as the first of Columbia's "Mad Doctor" films with Boris Karloff, *THE MAN THEY COULD NOT HANG*.) Contemporary reviews indicate that *MENACE* was also an Owen Davis play! The stories are remarkably similar—a group of people who are more or less responsible for the death of a relation of a none-too-tightly-wrapped individual are stranded in an isolated setting and marked for slaughter by the vengeance-seeking madman. (Yes, it seems more than a little likely that Agatha Christie came across one or more of these versions of the story prior to writing her 1939 mystery *And Then There Were None*.)

Of all the takes on this tale, *MENACE* is by far the least elaborate, but possibly more fun than some of the others. The number of potential victims is whittled down to three characters played by Gertrude Michael, Paul Cavanagh,

and Berton Churchill. Their culpability for the death of Ray Milland's character is questionable at best, since all they do is encourage him to make up a fourth at bridge, resulting in his own dereliction of duty, which in turn causes a dam to break and his mother and sister to be drowned in the flood, followed by his guilt-ridden suicide. Alas, his certifiably crazy brother doesn't see it this way and escapes from an asylum to exact his revenge.

With one notable exception provided by Halliwell Hobbes (which I won't spoil for the uninitiated), the film runs along a fairly predictable path, heightened by good dialogue and a splendid performance from the always delightful Henrietta Crosman. Crosman's character—an outspoken, outrageous old lady with a taste for high living and fast cars—quite makes the latter part of the film. One of her best moments comes when she takes a gun away from Forrester Harvey to help pave the way for true love, announcing, "I'm a cold-blooded woman and I'd as soon shoot you as look at you. Now, you listen to me—this boy's right, you're all fools. I'm an old woman—old enough to be mother to any one of you—but I can recognize the plea of a boy in love!" Just as good is her outburst when the mystery killer is finally unmasked: "Before they hang you, you'll hear from my lawyer! You can't wreck my automobile and get away with it!" The most startling thing about the film is perhaps its jaunty end-credit music (familiar now for its use the following year for W.C. Fields' *MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE*), which is certainly a jarringly upbeat note on which to end not only a wild and wooly thriller, but the decade's Paramount horrors altogether!



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OUR MAN ON BAKER

Continued from page 27

over some railings that have a longer drop on the other side, he slips and his handcuffs catch on the spikes. This leaves him dangling and at the mercy of the mob, who swarm around him from both sides of the railing, hurling abuse and blows. There is an element of the crucifixion in this scene. Certainly, the image of a man hanging helplessly was a favourite of Hitchcock's—he used it in SABOTAGE (1936), FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT (1940), TO CATCH A THIEF (1955), VERTIGO (1958), and NORTH BY NORTHWEST (1959). Thank goodness Joe receives the news that, "My God, he is innocent. The real Avenger was taken red-handed 10 minutes ago."

So there is a happy ending, no doubt filmed through gritted teeth by Alfred Hitchcock. Nevertheless, the film is a remarkable piece of cinema and, as suggested earlier, is perhaps more effective because of the lack of sound. There are some longeurs, mainly through the over-studied playing of Ivor Novello (who was more used to the musical comedy stage than movie thrillers), but the crafty images, the effective, seductive ambiguities, and the stealthy camera creating mood and tension, more than succeed in making up for any tedium. In its day, the film was innovative and, as one critic observed, "pure cinema." It also set Sir



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Alfred on a path from which he hardly deviated during his long chill-making career.

INSIDE THE X-FILES

Continued from page 14

FBI headquarters for questioning, professing no knowledge of his miraculous act. Simultaneously, a man identical to Smith is abducted from his workplace by Cancer Man and his goons, who lock him in irons in a remote prison.

The revelations in "Talitha Cumi" about clones, colonization plans, and warring alien races typically engender more questions than they answer. The most satisfying aspect of this cliffhanger is its abundance of character exchanges, most notably between Mulder and his ailing mother, and between Cancer Man and his alien captive, Jeremiah Smith (well played by Roy Thinnes, a former UFO chaser himself in the 1967 TV series THE INVADERS).

Laser collectors will not be disappointed in these discs, which contain the same excellent picture quality and surround stereo as the others in the series. Each episode includes multiple chapter stops, and an introduction by executive producer Chris Carter, whose informative comments this time around are briefer and more circumspect, allowing first-time viewers a chance to confront the conspiracies unspoiled.

—John J. Mathews

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SCREEN AND SCREEN

Continued from page 25

EARTH (1957), where the big guy manages to throw the Mexican army's entire supply of tanks into the stands, and downs a copter flown by one stupid pilot. Borrowing from classical literature, the good guys find the weak spot in the dragon's throat and yadda yadda yadda . . . (Some people might say two yaddas are enough for this film, but I get paid by the word here.)

The laserdisc presentation is capped by the original theatrical trailer, which ironically (and erroneously) claims that THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS and THEM! were just warm-ups for THE BLACK SCORPION. Frankly, SCORPION ain't fit to tie their sneakers.

—John E. Payne

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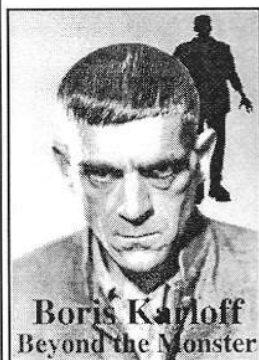
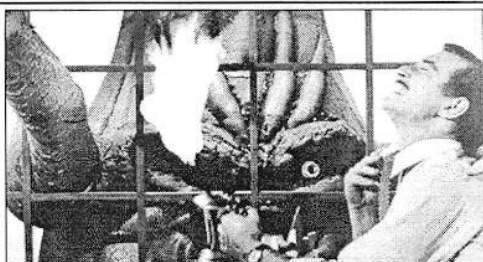
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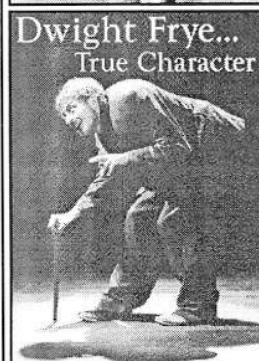
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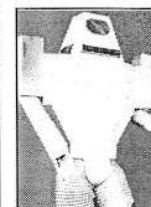
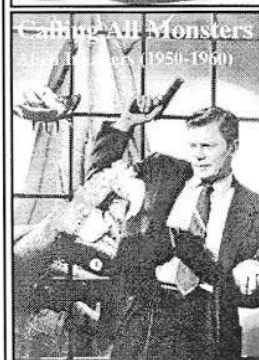
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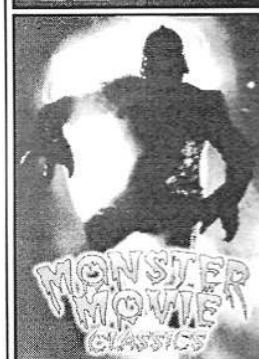
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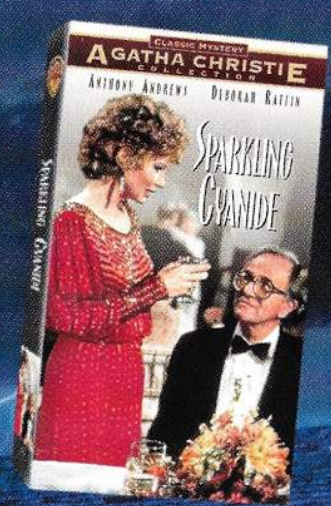
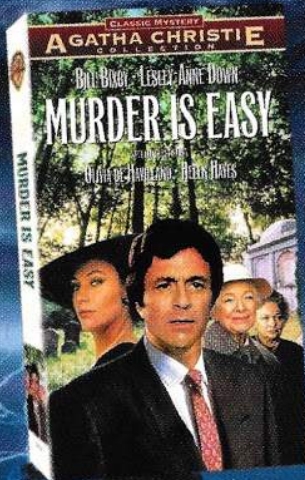
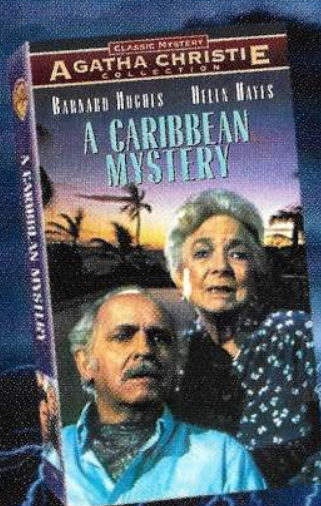
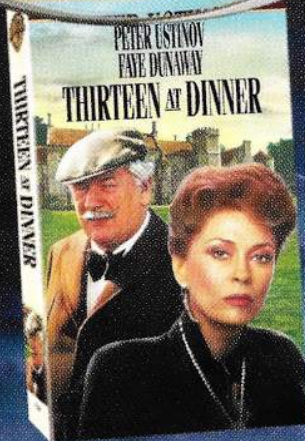
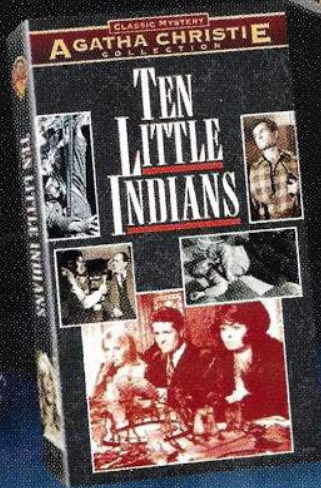
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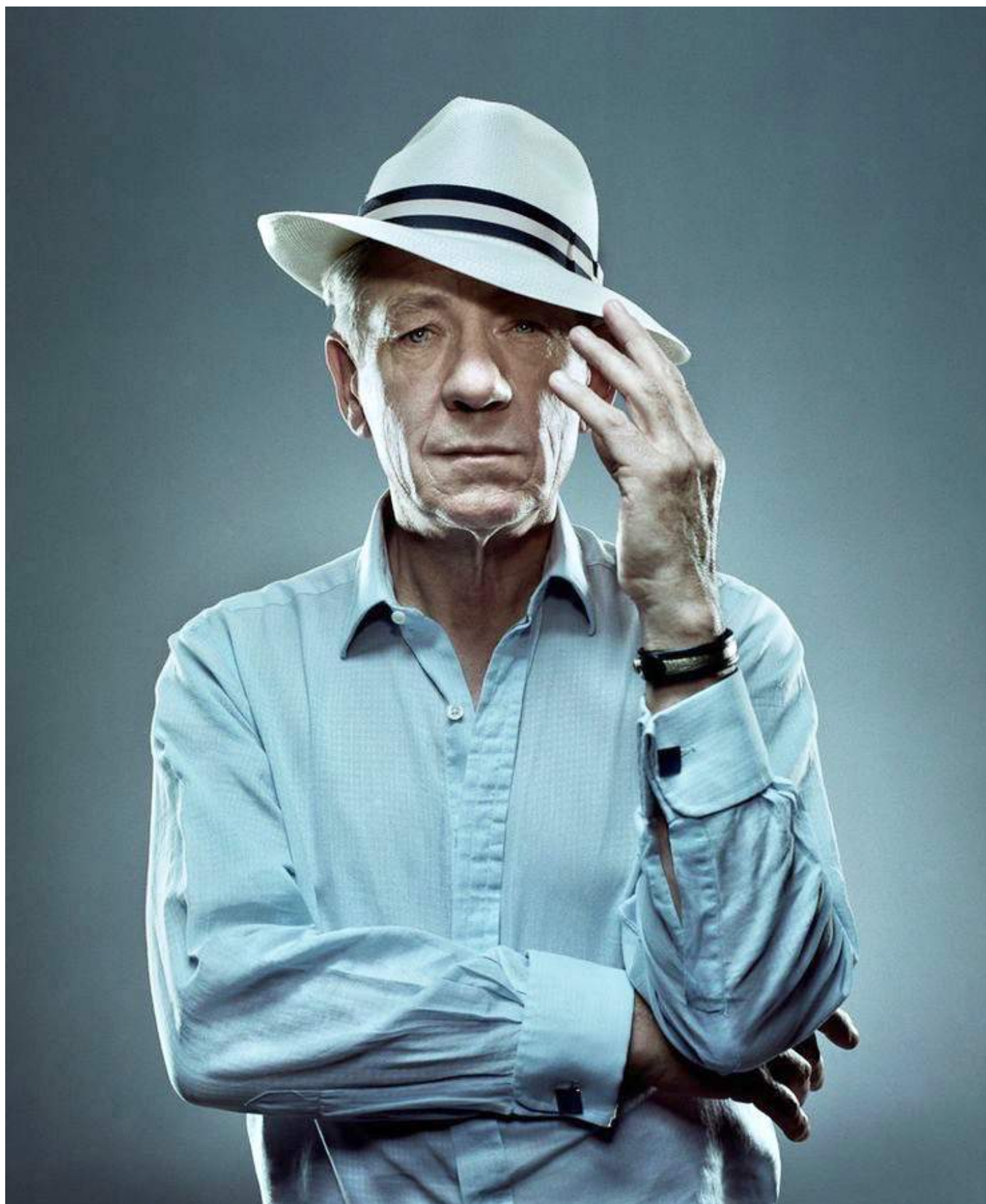
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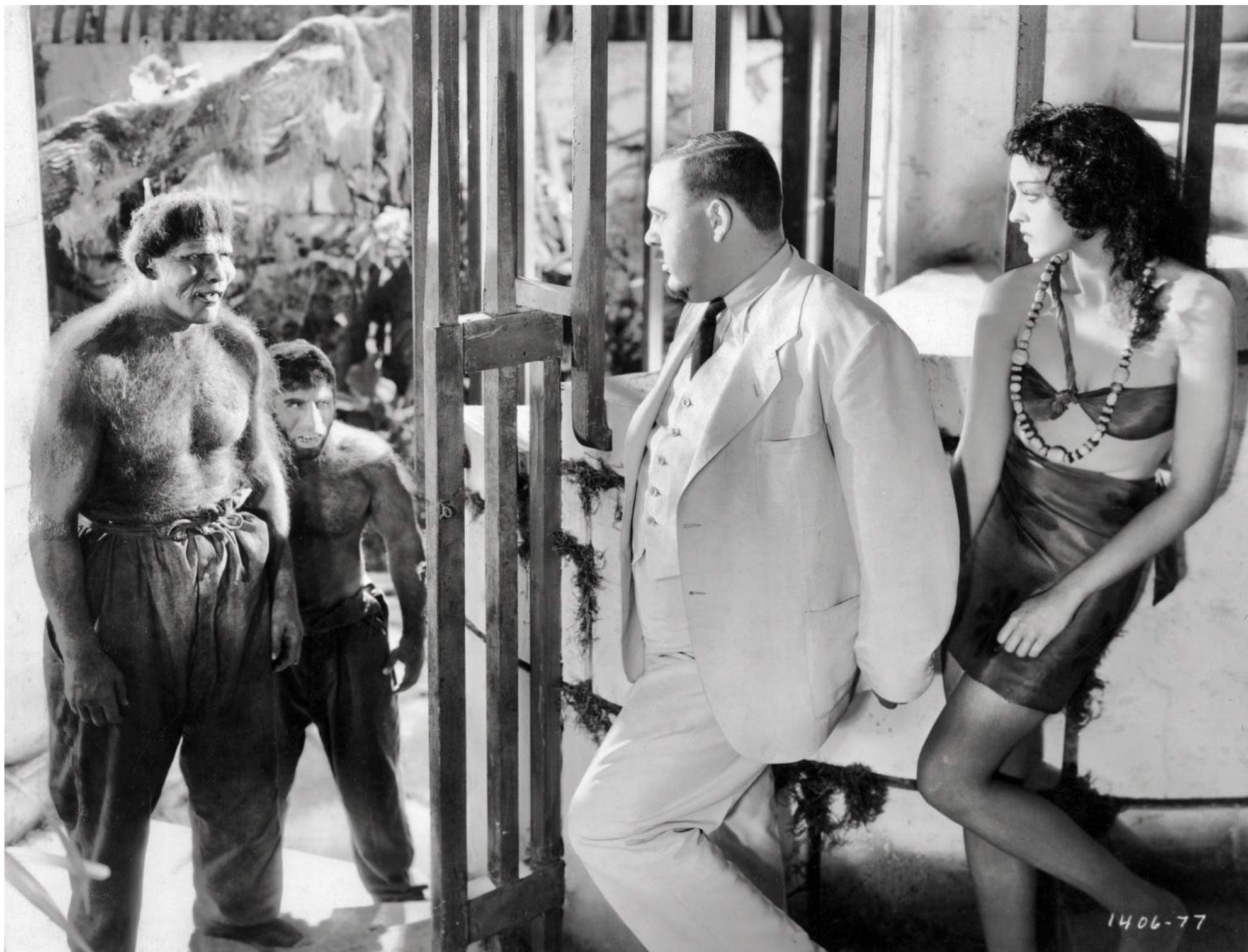




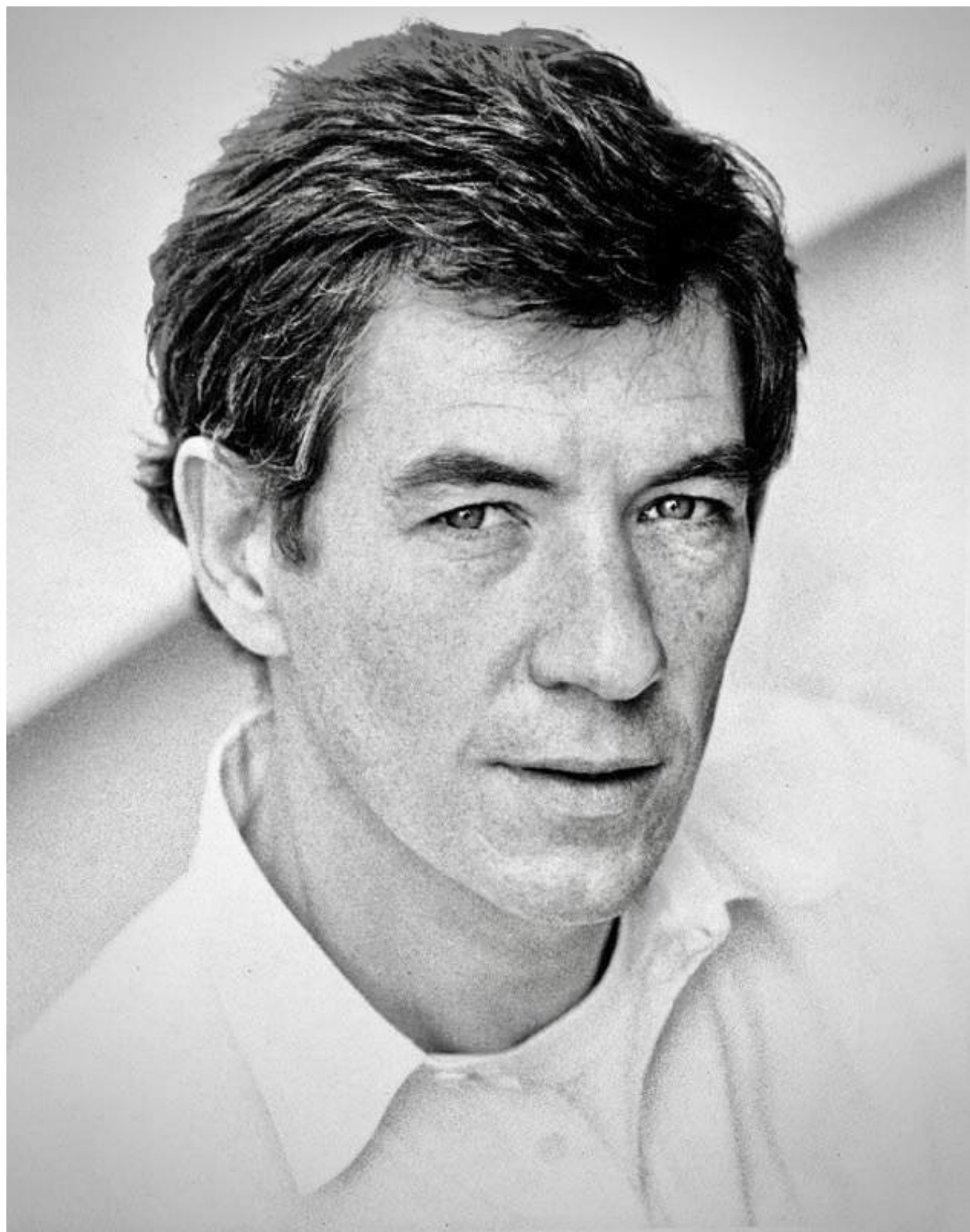
















Fredric March in "DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY" with Evelyn Venable, Sir Guy Standing and Kent Taylor

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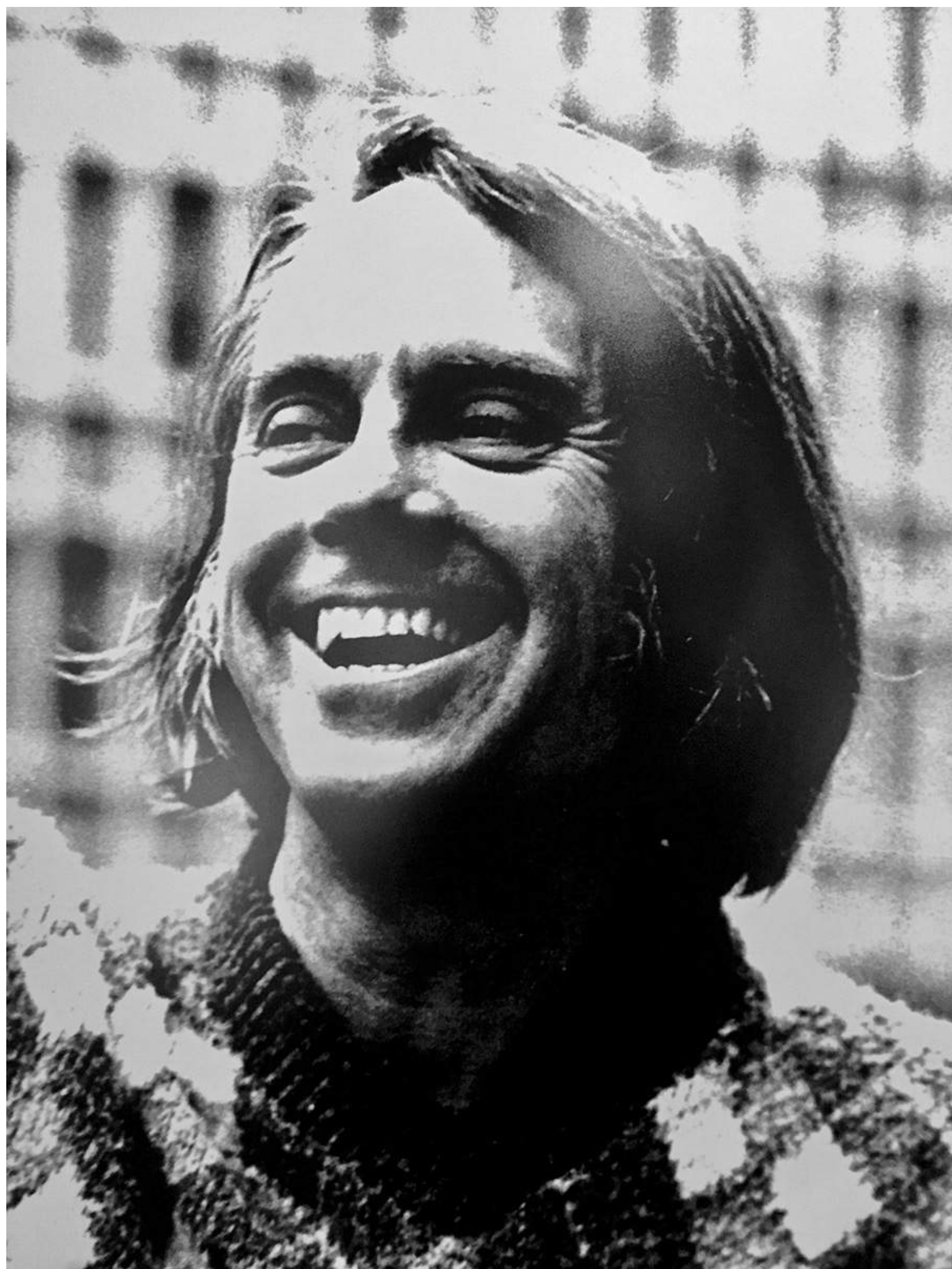
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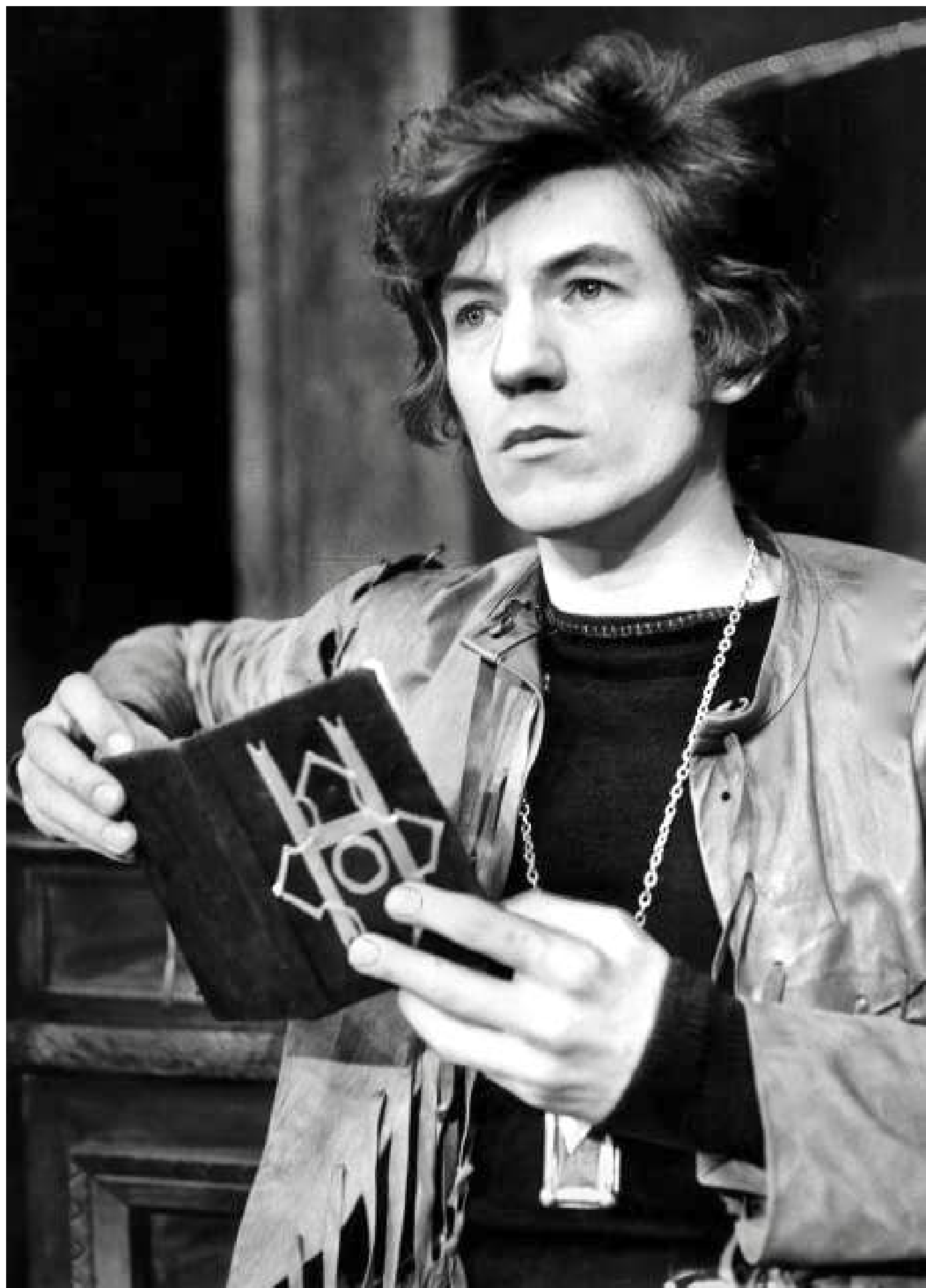


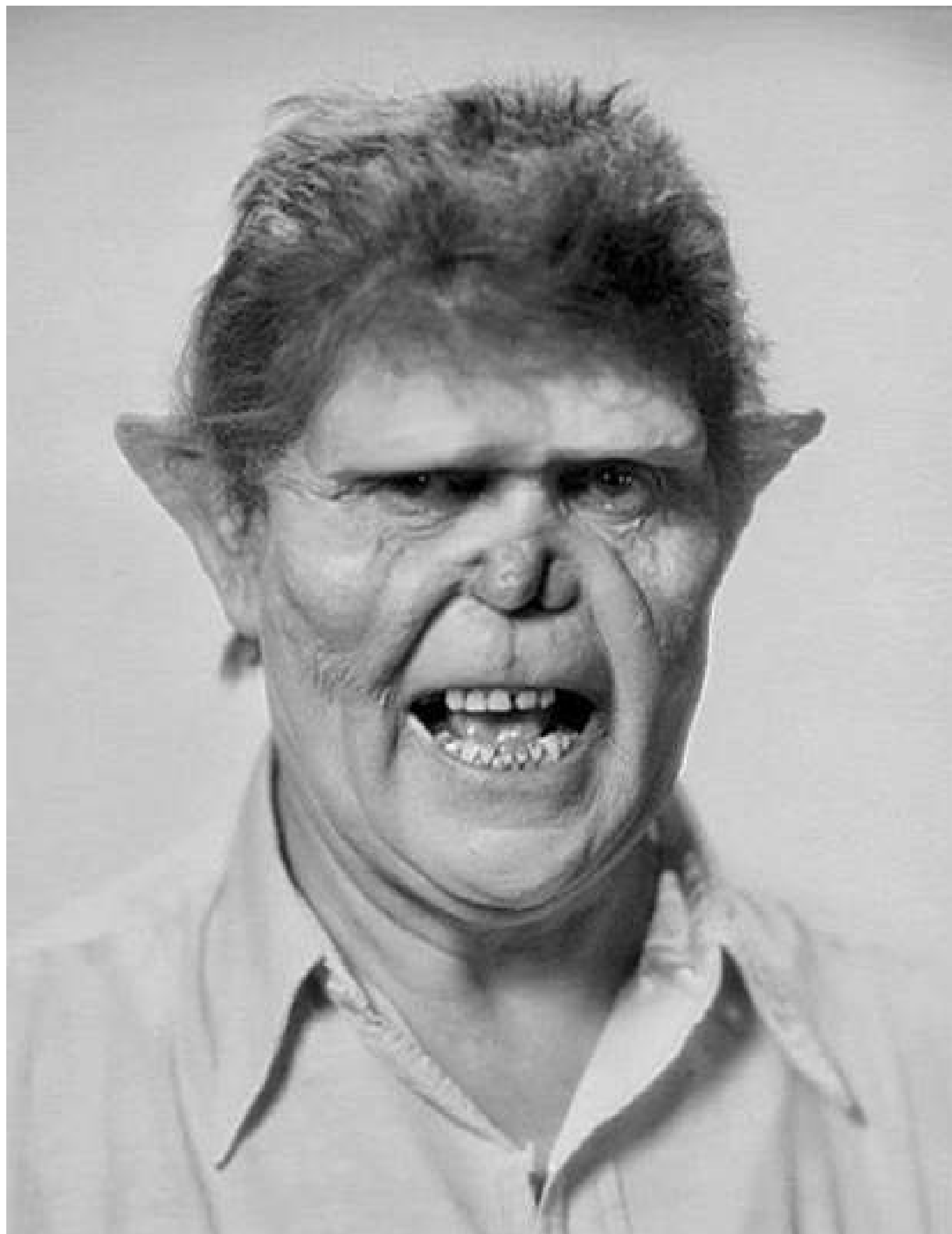












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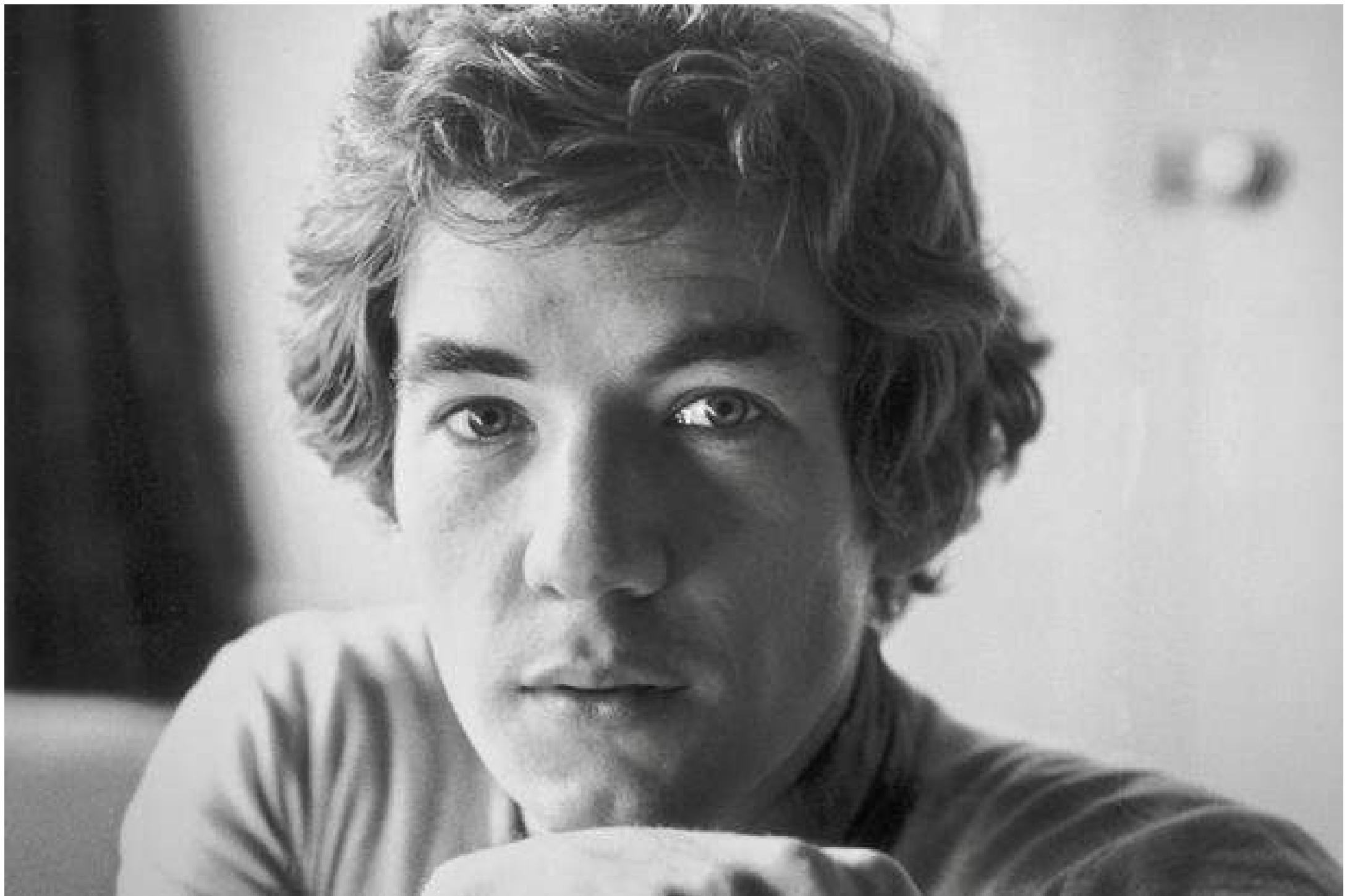






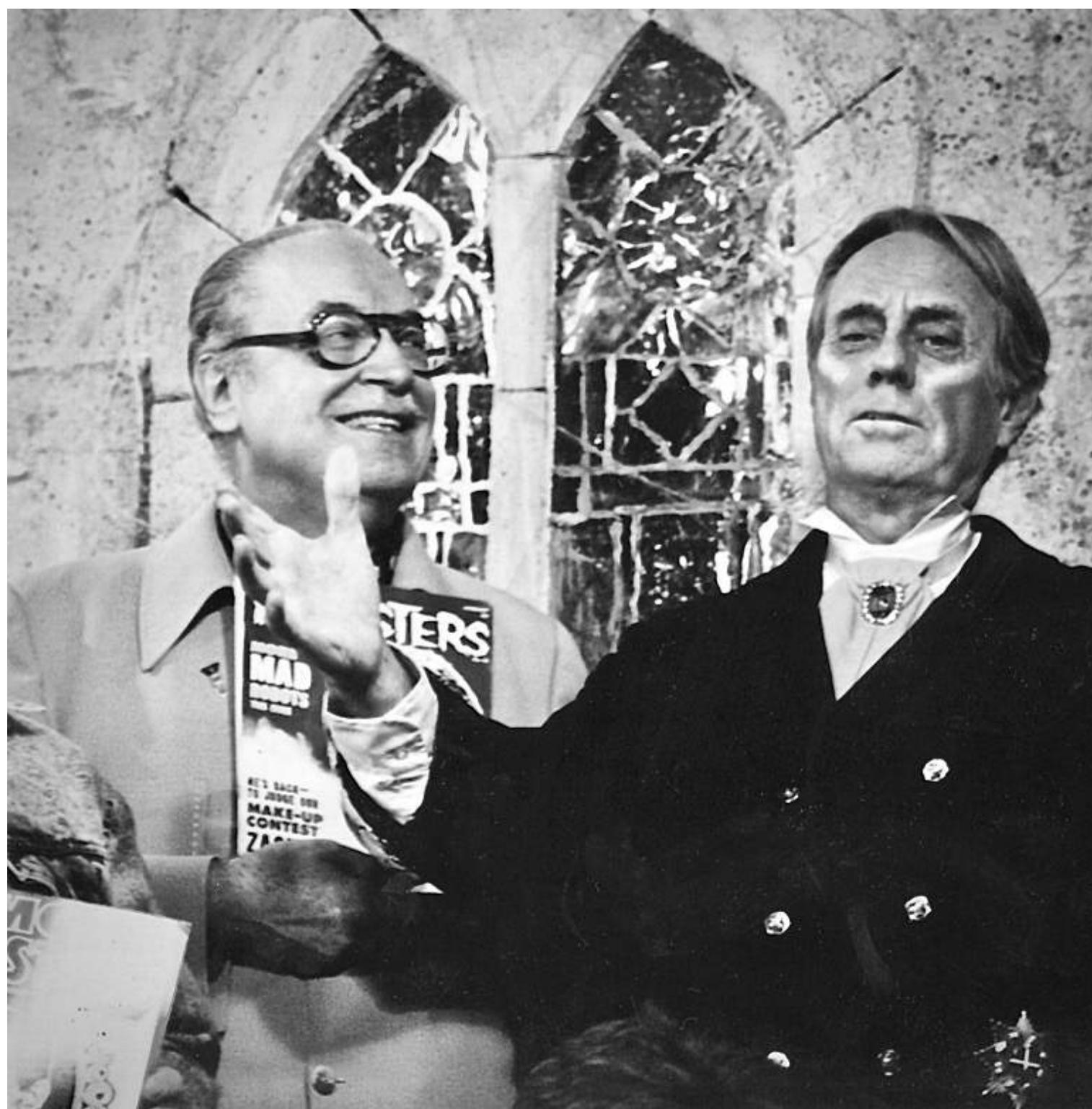










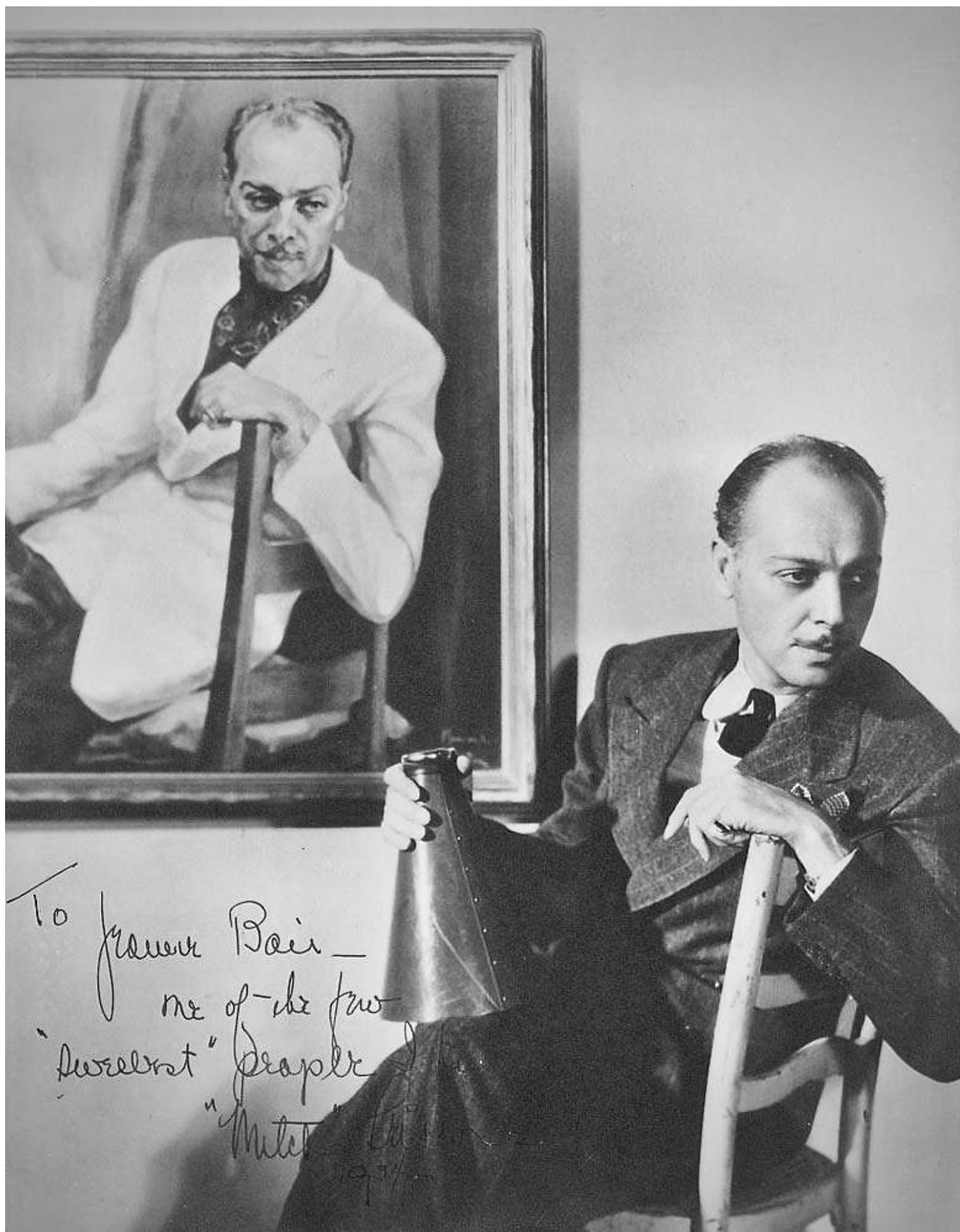












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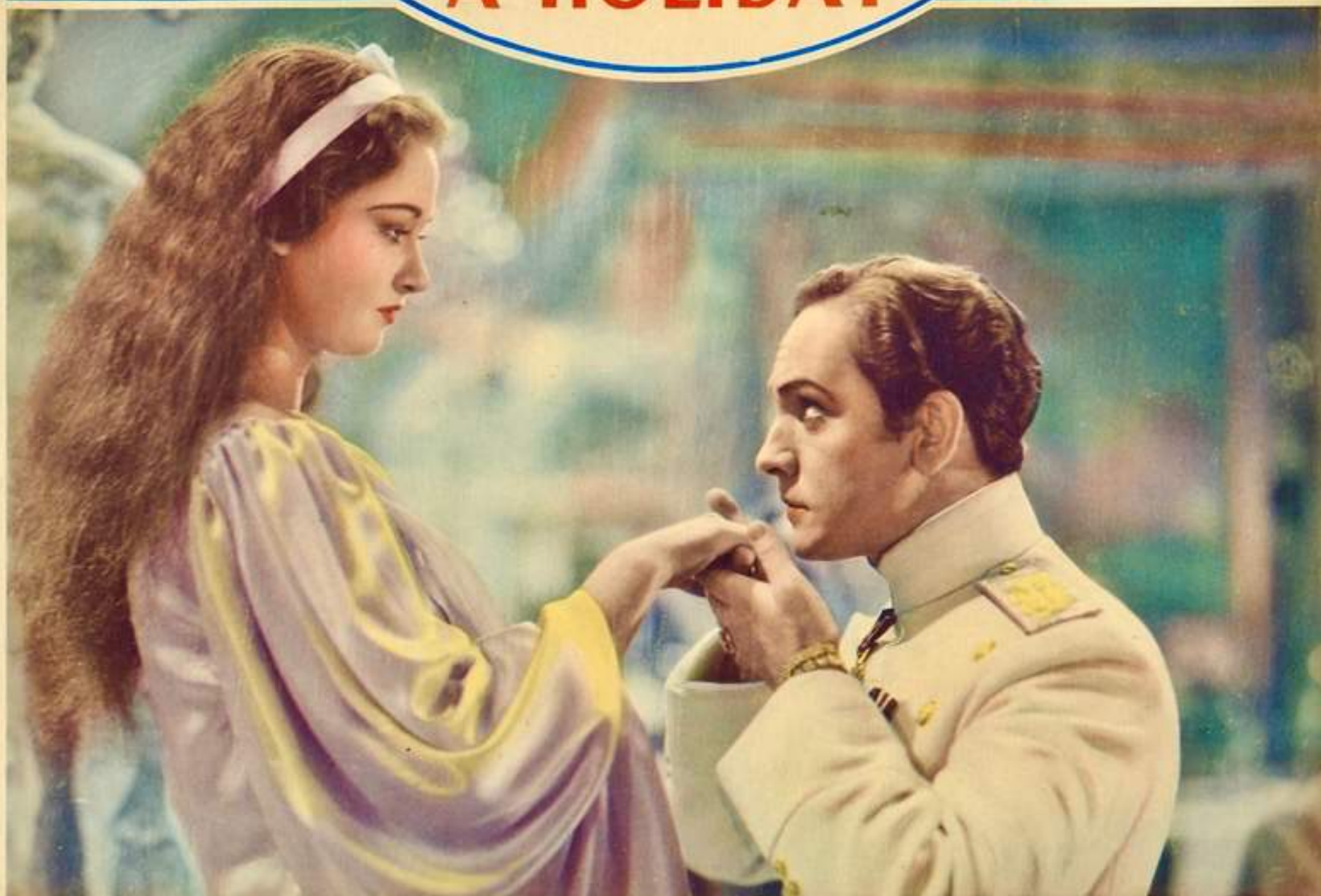
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The poster features a large, stylized face in the upper half, rendered in shades of blue, green, and yellow. The face has a prominent white circular shape over the left eye and a small, dark, wavy line for a mouth. Below the face, a white line drawing of a skeleton is visible, wearing a suit and tie. The skeleton's chest is marked with a cross and a circle. The background is a mix of blue and yellow gradients.

FREDRIC
MARCH

döden tar semester

EVELYN VENABLE
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["DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY"]
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